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JESSIE TRIM.

VOL. III.



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JESSIE TRIM.

CHAPTER I.

JESSIE'S BIRTHDAY.

THE morning of Jessie's birthday rose bright and clear. How well I remember it, and every trivial feature connected with it, which, apparently but little noted at the time, impressed itself indelibly upon my mind! Often afterwards, in thinking of that day—and how many, many times have my thoughts dwelt upon it!—a rift of light has pierced the black cloud which overshadowed it, and I have seen myself, as I stepped into the street soon after sunrise, stopping to pick up a pin which lay on the pavement. I have awoke in the night, sobbing in bitterest grief, and this

smallest and most uneventful of incidents has been the clearest thing I have seen in connection with that day. Other incidents as trivial are clear to me—a costermonger wheeling his barrow, loaded with fruit; a policeman standing by a lamp-post chewing a piece of straw; a woman who brushed past me humming a line of a song. I see the exact arrangement of the fruit in the costermonger's barrow; the face of the policeman is as familiar to me as if he had been an intimate friend; I hear the few words the woman hummed, with the precise and delicate intonations she gave to them. And yet, had these incidents occurred at the North Pole, they could not have been more utterly disconnected from the great and sorrowful event which made the day memorable to me.

My mother had not been well during the past week, and for a day or two had been compelled to keep her room. On one of these days I had gone to Mr. Rackstraw's office for Jessie, and had learned that she had left an hour before my arrival. Hastening home,

I found her by my mother's bedside, nursing my mother. Hearing my step on the stairs, Jessie had come to the bed-room door, and had whispered to me indignantly,

"If I had been in your place I think I should have stopped at home with my mother, knowing what a comfort my presence was to her, instead of running after a foolish wilful girl."

Before I had time for reply, my mother had called out, in her thin sweet voice,

"Jessie, what are you saying to Chris?"

Then Jessie had left us together, and my mother, drawing my head on her pillow, told me how kind and gentle 'Jessie had been to her, and made my pulses thrill with delight by her praises of the girl whom I loved with all my soul. Something noticeable had occurred within an hour after that. Going into the parlour down-stairs, I noticed that Jessie had a pair of new gold earrings in her ears. Now I was sure that she had not worn them when she met me at the door of my mother's bed-room. They were

of a pretty and graceful pattern, and became her. I had not given them to her; who had? I looked towards uncle Bryan—but, no; he was not the giver, for his eyes were fixed upon them suspiciously and disapprovingly. It hurt me to see them in her ears, but I would not ask her about them, preferring the pain which lay in ignorance. Besides, I would show Jessie what confidence I had in her, by waiting until she chose to tell me of her own accord who was the giver. But Jessie said not a word on the subject.

On Jessie's birthday my mother was better although not quite well. We had arranged between us that there should be a little feast at home in the evening, in honour of Jessie, and that Jessie should not be told of it beforehand. I contemplated another surprise for Jessie, and I consulted my mother concerning it.

“Nothing would please Jessie so much as having one of her friends at our little party.”

My mother looked doubtfully at me. Since we had lived in uncle Bryan's house, no stranger had ever sat down at our table.

"I don't think uncle Bryan can possibly object," I said. "It is only Josey West, Jessie's best friend, and one of the kindest-hearted creatures in the world. Before you knew her five minutes you would love her, and I believe she would even take uncle Bryan's fancy, strange as he is."

"Will you ask him, or shall I, my dear?"

"You had better," I answered; "you have more patience with him than I. If he refused me, I should quarrel with him perhaps. Tell him she's deformed, and as good as gold."

A few hours afterwards my mother said,

"Your uncle says we can do as we please. He consents, my dear."

"Ungraciously, of course," I added; "but never mind, so long as Josey is here. Not a word to Jessie, mother."

I enjoined secrecy also on Josey West,

who was really glad of the opportunity of making my mother's personal acquaintance.

"I shall throw my arms round her neck," said Josey, "and kiss her the moment I see her. And as for you," she added, with a fair disregard of sequence in her speech, "you are a wise young man. Now what made you think of me at all?"

"Because I knew it would please Jessie," I answered honestly, "and because I want to make Jessie's birthday the happiest day in her life and mine."

She pinched my cheek merrily, as though she understood my meaning.

I had fully resolved that on that day I would ask Jessie to be my wife. Tortured almost beyond endurance by the doubts and difficulties which surrounded me, I had in some way gathered courage to look my position steadily in the face, and the moment I did so, the way seemed clear before me. I became strengthened immediately, and the fair promise which hope held forth appeared realised in anticipation. I set

aside all obstacles for future consideration, and mentally leaped out of the entanglement of feeling which had brought so much discomfort into our lives. "It is for me to speak," I thought, "and to speak plainly and manfully." I painted the future in the fairest colours. My prospects of success were growing brighter and brighter; my sketches for the Christmas story which had been entrusted to me to illustrate were approved of by the author and the publisher, and I felt I only wanted opportunity to rise far above the sphere of life which, in the natural course of things, I could have expected to occupy. "Jessie's love for the stage," I thought, "and her wish to become an actress, only arise from her thoughtfulness of her future, and from her state of dependence on uncle Bryan. Well, I can clear away all doubt; I can offer her a good home; and I can release her from uncle Bryan, and, if she wishes, can pay him what she thinks she owes him." I resolutely closed the eyes of my mind on my mother's declaration, that

wherever our home was, uncle Bryan must share it. I knew too well that it would be impossible for Jessie and me to be happy together, with him as a member of our household. All these things could be considered and settled by-and-by, when Jessie had promised to be my wife. I reproached myself that I had not spoken plainly to her before now; I had, as it were, driven her by my faint-heartedness to do what she might not have done, if she had had a protector whom she loved and who loved her. All this and other reasoning of the same nature I carried out exactly in the way which best suited my hopes, and at length I lay in my cloud-built castles at peace with myself; for it was not to be doubted that my dearest wishes would now be surely realised. I had an intuitive consciousness that Josey West was thoroughly acquainted with the position of affairs between Jessie and me, and knowing her to be my friend, I was convinced that she would have warned me if she had any doubt of Jessie's affection for me.

So that it was all clear sailing. What would come, would come, but the bliss which I should presently taste, the bliss of knowing Jessie to be mine, and mine only, was all sufficient. Outside our own two personalities there was nothing else to be considered. Nothing else? No one else? No; for this one greatest of all joys secured, all difficulties which once seemed to threaten to mar its fulfilment *must* melt away, as surely as snow melts before the sun. I pleased myself with this commonplace metaphor, and utterly overlooked the common sense of things (common sense, indeed, in this case being the very slave of sentiment)—utterly overlooked the possibility that the current of others' feelings, of others' likes and dislikes, of others' ideas of right and wrong, could run in a different direction from that down which I was sailing with my hopes realised. It is thus, I suppose, sometimes with other selfish natures than mine.

I was up and out early in the morning. I could not sleep the night before, and wish-

ing to give Jessie a bouquet of fresh flowers, I had determined to walk to Covent Garden to buy them. I had a bouquet made of the sweetest and loveliest flowers, and I took it to our house by the back way, and hid it in my work-room. How many times I looked at it, and how in every delicate leaf I found a sentiment which formed a connecting link between me and Jessie, it is unnecessary here to describe. In the afternoon I had to go to the jeweller's for the watch for Jessie, the inscription on which could not be completed before; and when I held it in my hand and read the words, "From Chris to Jessie, on her eighteenth birthday. With undying love," I saw Jessie's beautiful eyes looking into mine, and I uttered an exclamation of delight which must have satisfied the jeweller that his work was approved of. Then there was the ivory brooch shaped in the form of a true lover's knot. Perhaps Jessie would allow me to fasten it in the bosom of her dress, as she had allowed me to take the ribbon from her neck, which was now round

mine, with the locket she had given me on *my* birthday. No one but I had yet seen or knew of these offerings of love. It was to be a day of delightful surprises.

I was at home with my flowers before breakfast.

"What made you go out so early this morning, Chris?" Jessie enquired over breakfast.

"That's a secret," I answered gaily; "you shall know to-night."

My mother had already questioned me in private, and I had easily satisfied her. Something unusual occurred when we had finished breakfast. Jessie went to uncle Bryan's side, and spoke to him.

"Do you know it's my birthday, to-day, uncle Bryan?"

"I have heard so." Then after a short pause: "May it be a day of good remembrance to you!"

Nothing more; not a kiss, not even a hand-shake. And yet she invited it in the tenderest manner, as she stood before him,

bright and beautiful, in a new light print dress, with a small lilac flower. I never see a dress with such a pattern without an odd sensation at my heart. She did not move from the spot until he, after some mental communing, I think, turned from her and went into the shop. I experienced a feeling very much like hatred towards him for his hardness and insensibility.

My mother took Jessie's hand.

"May your life be bright and happy, dear child!"

She hid her face in my mother's bosom for a little while in silence; then they kissed each other. Ah, the world was bright with such a flower in it!

"And you, Chris?" she said presently, holding out her hand to me.

"I shall wish you nothing until to-night," I said, with an effort of great self-restraint, "except in my heart."

She nodded, and smiled, and busied herself about the room, insisting that my mother should sit and rest while she did the work

of the house. But my mother, laughing, said that she could not allow it, as Jessie would find out all her secrets; then ensued fond coaxing and teasing, which ended, as I was afraid it would do, in my mother whispering to Jessie that we were going to have a little feast that night in her honour, and that Josey West was coming to spend the evening with us.

“A nice one you are to keep a secret, I called merrily after them as they went out of the room with their arms around each other’s waist, like mother and daughter; “it’s a good job I didn’t tell you everything.”

What with my work and other duties, I saw but little of Jessie during the day; and in the evening I dressed myself in my best, and went for a walk, with the intention of not coming home until past eight o’clock, when Josey West would be at our house, and when everything would be prepared to celebrate Jessie’s birthday in a befitting manner. I carried out my programme faith-

fully, and entered the parlour with a beating heart and flushed face. The room was very bright. My mother had on her best cap and dress, and in the rapid glance I cast at uncle Bryan, who was behind the counter, as I walked through the shop, I fancied I detected some change for the better in his appearance; I fancied also that he expected to see some one with me. Josey West was in the parlour, and the dear little soul was holding my mother's hand in hers with tender feeling. They were already the best of friends. My mother stood on tiptoe to look over my shoulder.

"Whom for, mother?" I asked.

"I was looking for Jessie, my dear. Has she not been out walking with you?"

"No, mother."

"Ah," exclaimed Josey West briskly, "she'll be in presently. I dare say she is going to surprise us with something."

Unable to keep my secret any longer, I said that I had something to surprise Jessie with when she came in; and I brought the

flowers from my work-room, and placed them on the table. Then I showed them the brooch and the watch; before I knew it, Josey had opened the case, and read the inscription, and pointed it out to my mother.

"And is it so, really?" Josey asked tantalisingly.

"Why, you knew it was so," I answered, very hot and red.

And my mother left Josey, and came and pressed me fondly in her arms.

But where was Jessie? She was nowhere in the house.

"Perhaps she's at mine," suggested Josey; "run round, and bring her. I daresay she's waiting for you there." This with the wickedest of laughs.

But Jessie was not at Josey West's house, nor was she at home when I returned. Our perplexity soon turned to alarm. We looked at each other, to see whether any one of us held the key of Jessie's absence; my suspicions lighted on Josey West, but a frank look assured me that I had no right to suspect

her. For an hour I walked about the street watching for Jessie.

“Can anything have happened to her?” my mother asked.

Uncle Bryan was in the room when my mother spoke. He also, in his own way, shared our alarm.

“Mother,” I said, inspired by a sudden thought, “if Jessie comes while I am away, do not let her go out again. I shall not be long.”

My thought was to run to Mr. Rackstraw’s office to make enquiries, although I knew full well that the office was closed hours ago. But I could not remain still. As I turned to go from the room, a boy’s voice in the shop arrested my steps. He was inquiring for Mr. Bryan Carey and my mother. Uncle Bryan, answering the lad, came in with a letter, addressed to my mother. I saw that the writing was Jessie’s, and I took the letter from his hand.

“I *must* open it, mother,” I said.

The letter contained these words :

“I have gone away, and shall not return. Forgive me for all the trouble I have brought among you, but I think I have not been entirely to blame. Do not be sorry that I have gone ; I have caused you too much pain already. It will be useless, if you find where I am, endeavouring to prevail upon me to return. I would starve rather than enter the house again.

“ JESSIE.”

CHAPTER II.

I SPEAK PLAINLY TO UNCLE BRYAN.

THE paper which I held in my hand became blurred in my sight, and for a few moments the only thing that was clear to me was that Jessie was lost to me, and that all possible happiness had gone out of my life.

There was no mistaking the meaning of Jessie's letter to my mother. It was intended to snap at once and for ever the bonds which united us. She had set herself free from her miserable thralldom, and she was not to be wooed back. "It will be useless, if you find where I am, endeavouring to prevail upon me to return. I would starve rather than enter the house again." I heard her speak these words in

sharp incisive tones, and I knew too well that she was not to be turned from her purpose. All was over between us, and this day, which I had fondly imagined was to be the happiest in our lives, had sealed the destruction of all my hopes.

Two trivial circumstances recalled me to the realities of the scene. One was the ticking of the watch which I had intended as a birthday present for Jessie; the other was a slight rustling of paper. I had observed, when uncle Bryan entered the room with the letter for my mother, that he held another paper in his hand, which must have been addressed to himself. It was the rustling of this paper which now attracted my attention. Uncle Bryan had opened it, and was reading it. He could have read but a very few lines when a ghastly pallor overspread his features, and his hands trembled from excess of agitation. Every muscle in his face was quivering, and even in the midst of my own suffering these signs of suffering in him did not escape me. They did not

move me to pity ; they stirred me rather to a more bitter resentment against him. He, and he alone, was the cause of all my misery ; he, and he alone, had brought this blight upon my life.

I did not know, until I attempted to move towards him, that my mother's arms were round me. I had no distinct intention of raising my hand against him, but it might have occurred, and my mother feared it and clung to me convulsively. I released myself from her arms, and I stood before him, barring the way, for I detected in him a desire to leave the room unobserved. He gazed at me in a weak uncertain manner ; all his old strength and sternness of character seemed to have deserted him, and he was suddenly transformed into a weak and worn old man. That his sorrow-stricken face should have won sympathy from my mother and Josey West—as I saw clearly it had—I construed into an additional wrong against myself, committed not by them, but by him. It inflamed me the more ; I felt that my passion must have

vent, and that it was impossible for me to be silent.

“Let me pass.”

I did not hear the words, for his throat was parched, and refused to give them utterance; but I knew that he had striven to speak them.

“Not till you have heard what I have to say,” was my reply, as I stood before him.

My mother crept to my side, but I was not to be turned from my purpose. I could hear and feel the rapid beating of her heart against my hand, which she had taken in hers and pressed to her bosom, but the selfish intensity of my own grief made me deaf and blind to everything else. Uncle Bryan did not answer me; he strove feebly to pass me again, but I prevented him from doing so. Something in my attitude caused Josey West to place herself between us.

“I hope you are satisfied,” I said. “You have driven her from us. What is the next thing you intend to do?”

I paused for his reply, but he did not speak.

“I intended to ask Jessie to-night to be my wife. I don’t know what her answer would have been, but I think I know what it might have been but for your systematic cruelty. Will it add to your satisfaction to know that I had set all my hopes of happiness upon her, and that you have driven these from my heart, as you have driven her from your door? I loved her with all my soul. I was not worthy of her; she is far above me and every one here; but I loved her most truly and sincerely, and you have stepped between us and parted us for ever. Does it please you to be assured of this?—— Nay, mother, I *will* speak. I have been silent until now, out of my love for you, and because I knew that you had given even him a place in your tender heart. He has requited you nobly for it. If I had spoken openly before now, things might have been different, but I held my tongue, like a coward, and because I had some latent notion that he

deserved respect from me. I think so no longer. On my last birthday," I continued, addressing him, "you gave me certain advice which I believed to be good; among other things you said that it is seldom a man can look back upon his life with satisfaction. You drew that from your own experience. With what kind of satisfaction do you look back upon your own life? A man with any tenderness for others in his nature would shrink with horror from the contemplation of such a life as yours. But perhaps you find it a pleasant task to blight the hopes and happiness of those who have the misfortune to come in contact with you. Having no children of your own upon whom you could practise in this way, you turned your attention to others, and you have succeeded most thoroughly. You said to me, when I was of age, that I was a man, with a man's responsibility, and a man's work to do, and you bade me do it faithfully. I have tried to do it—my mother knows that, and so does Miss West, I think—in the

hope that it would lead to a good result. But when you addressed those words to me, did you think of yourself, and the example of your own life? They sounded well, but did you consider your own responsibility—or did you believe that *you*, apart from all other men in the world, had no responsibility which it behoved you to look to? You brought Jessie here, a friendless, helpless girl—a girl whom nobody but you could help loving for the goodness that is in her. She brought sunshine into this house, which was gloomy enough without her. She had no mother, no father, no friends, and you were her only protector. How have you fulfilled your duty towards her? Shall I answer for you? You have behaved like a tyrant, in whom all human feeling was deadened. When she strove to love you, you compelled her, by harsh words and cold looks and repellent acts, to hate you. She has good cause for her feelings towards you now, for you did your best to make every hour and every day

of her life a misery to her. She told me herself that she was only happy out of the house ; so that you did your work well. If you saw faults in her which no one else saw, and which had their birth in your own hard unfeeling nature, what right had you to torture her in the way you did ? She was but a child, and you are an old man. Why could you not have dealt tenderly and gently by her ? Ask my mother—ask Miss West—ask any of her friends—if there is anything in her character that might not be turned to good account ? But you could not see it. Light-heartedness and an innocent flow of spirits are crimes in your eyes. You made her pay bitterly for the shelter you gave her ; you have shown the generosity of your nature in its fullest light by making her say, after a long experience of you, that she would starve rather than enter your house again. When you told us the story of your life, you said you wished me to hear it because I might learn something from it. I have learnt something—but not the lesson

you wished me to learn. I have learnt that such a life as yours, such a nature as yours, brings desolation upon every life and nature within its influence, and that it would be a happier fate for me to drop down dead this minute than live as you have lived, a torture to all around you."

"Chris, Chris!" implored my mother, with streaming eyes, and with a gesture of entreaty towards uncle Bryan, who sat before me now, with his head bowed upon his hands. "Remember, my dear child, remember?"

"Remember what, mother?" I cried pitilessly. "That he has robbed me of all that can make life dear to me—of all that *is* dear to me? You should ask me rather to forget when you point to him, whom I would teach a different lesson if he were not an old man, with one foot in the grave. Shall I remember that he has no belief in goodness here or hereafter—that he believes neither in God nor man? Will such remembrances as these plead in his favour? One thing I will and do remember—that I owe him money for

the food he has given me and you. But I will pay him to the last farthing, so that nothing may remain between us but what I owe him for having brought misery into my life. That is a debt that can never be wiped out. And Jessie will pay him also; she told me she would. But for that resolve she would not, for a long time past, have eaten a meal at his expense. Are these the things you wish me to remember?"

I knew that I was striking him hard with every word I uttered, but I would not spare him. I ransacked my mind to hurt him.

"And you, mother," I said pitilessly, "do you think you are just to me in pleading for him, and in disguising the opinion you have of him? When, knowing that all my hopes were set on Jessie, and that it was impossible for her and him to live happily in the same house, I proposed to make a home elsewhere, where we could live in happiness without him, did you show your love for me by saying that we must never leave him, and that, wherever our home was, he must share it?"

When he told us his story, for the purpose, as I now see, of setting us more and more against Jessie, and I asked you afterwards if you would like me to look on things as he does, what was your answer? ‘God forbid!’ you said; ‘it would take all the sweetness out of your life.’” (Uncle Bryan removed his hand from his eyes at this, and raised them for one moment to my mother’s white face; there was no reproach in them, but a look of humble grateful affection.) “In what was Jessie wrong that she should have been driven from us? In wishing him to go to church with us? Ask your own heart, mother, for an answer to that, and remember what occurred on the first Sunday night we were in this house. If I had known then what I know now, I would have starved rather than have accepted the shelter of his roof. Remember how, for days and weeks together, Jessie has been submissive and tender to him, striving by every means in her power to win his affection; and remember how her efforts were received and rewarded.

But for him Jessie might have been my wife ; you loved her, and she loved you. How often have you told me that you saw nothing in her but what was good ! I think at one time she would have consented to share my lot, but that dream is over now. There was an influence strong enough to turn love into hate, and to poison all our lives. I will remember this to my dying day, which I hope may not be far off. I have nothing worth living for. But one thing I am resolved upon—that while I live, those who love me shall choose between me and him.”

Josey West caught my arm suddenly and sharply.

“Are you mad ?” she cried. “Learn the lesson you want to teach others. Look at your mother.”

She let go my arm, and stepped swiftly to my mother’s side, in time to save her from falling to the ground. Uncle Bryan made a movement towards her, but I stood before him, and he shrank back. My mother’s strength had given way, and she had fainted.

I supported her in my arms, while Josey West loosened her dress and bathed her face. She opened her eyes presently, and, recognising me, pressed me convulsively to her breast.

“Oh my child, my child,” she sobbed, “my heart is almost broken !”

I looked round for uncle Bryan ; he was gone.

“What I did,” moaned my mother, “I did for the best. I prayed and hoped that time would set all things right. I see now that it was impossible, and that I was a weak foolish woman. But I loved you, my darling, and I would shed my heart’s blood for you. What sin have I committed that I should be punished by the loss of my dear child’s love ?”

“No, no, mother,” I cried remorsefully, “you must not say that. You have not lost it. God forbid that it should ever be so !”

I think she did not hear me, for she slid from my arms and knelt before me, imploring

me with sobs and broken words to forgive her. Many minutes passed before I succeeded in calming her, and then Josey West and I assisted her upstairs to her room, to the room which Jessie had made bright by her innocent devices.

“Jessie will never sleep here again,” I thought, with a choking sensation in my throat. “This was *her* room, Josey,” I said aloud.

Josey nodded gravely, and whispered to me that my mother must go to bed, and that she ought to see a doctor. “I hope she will not have a fever,” said Josey.

My mother’s eyes were wandering around her in a strange way; once or twice she looked at me as if she did not know me. The simple sound of my voice, however, recalled her to herself.

“Yes, dear child,” she said, with a smile so sad and sweet as to bring the tears into my eyes.

“Mother,” I whispered, “you know what has occurred?”

She considered for a moment or two ; I assisted her memory.

“Jessie,” I said.

“I know now,” she replied, with a look of distress. “Jessie has gone.”

“Will you be strong for my sake, mother?”

“I will do anything you tell me, my darling child,” she said, humbly.

“First I will go and send a doctor to you. Then I want to try and find Jessie.”

“Dear child, do you know where she is?”

“No ; and I have no hope of inducing her to return. I know she will never come back, but I cannot rest without doing something. I shall go mad if I stop in the house all night and make no effort to discover her.”

“Go, then, dear child,” she said ; and added imploringly, “You will come back, my darling, will you not ? You will not desert me after all these years?”

“How can you think it, mother ? I will come back, but it may be late.”

“I will keep awake for you, my darling.

Say nothing more to your uncle. Promise me that, dear child."

"I will not speak another word to him."

I turned to Josey West; she divined what I was about to say.

"I'll stop with your mother, if you *must* go. Run round to my house first, and say I sha'n't be home to-night. And look here. If Turk's there, you'd best take him with you. I suppose you are going to Mr. Rackstraw's?"

"That was my intention," I said.

"Of course you know the office will be closed; but I daresay it will relieve your feelings to thump at the door." She spoke fretfully; but her tone changed when she said, "Don't think only of yourself. Have some thought for your mother."

"One word, Josey. *You* have no idea where Jessie is?"

"Not the slightest," she replied.

"And you didn't know she was going away?"

"I had no more idea of it than you had."

“That night,” I said, hesitatingly, “when Mr. Glover was at your house——”

“Oh,” she interrupted in a sharp tone, “Mr. Glover! Well, what night?”

“A little while ago, when Jessie was there, and I was not. Did he pay her great attention?”

“Of course he did.”

“Did he seem fond of her?”

“It wouldn’t have been natural otherwise,” she replied, with a suspicious look at me. “Of course he seemed fond of her. Anything more?”

“No,” I said, with a sigh, “that’s all.”

I kissed my mother, and left the room. Her loving eyes followed me to the door.

CHAPTER III.

TURK MAKES A CONFESSION.

I FOUND Turk at his sister's house. He jumped up at once on my proposing that he should take a walk with me.

"I am glad of the opportunity, Chris, my boy," he said; "for I want to talk to you."

I answered, in as lively a tone as I could command, that I was at his service.

"Like a true friend as you are. The subject I want to talk about is spelt with four letters—s-e-l-f. Such a subject needs no overture; up with the curtain, then. I start with a self-evident proposition. A man must live. What do you say to that?"

I had nothing to say in contradiction.

"Very well, then. To live, one must have

money ; to have money (barring the silver spoon), one must work for it. Granted ?”

“Granted,” I assented, listlessly.

He looked at me in surprise at my despondent tone.

“Ah,” he said, “there’s more in that than meets the eye.”

“More in what, Turk ? In your proposition ?”

“No, Chris, my boy. In your face. You are in trouble.”

“I am, Turk ; in the deepest, most terrible trouble. I am utterly, utterly wretched. I have nothing in the world worth living for.”

“It’s bad when it comes to that,” he said, with an expression of deep concern.

“Money ?”

“No, Turk.”

“Heart ?”

My silence was a sufficient answer.

“Is the trouble of such a nature that it may be confided to a friend—to a friend with a kindred soul, Chris, my boy ?”

“I will tell you about it presently, Turk. Go on with your own story first.”

“In one act, then. Without detail. Since that ever-to-be-remembered night when a strong verdict was pronounced against me on the other side of Temple Bar, in which direction, by-the-bye, I see we are walking now—and when I determined to relinquish the profession in which I glory—I do, Chris, I glory in it; and you can hardly have an idea of the sacrifice I have made in giving it up—I have been looking about me. Not having been born with that silver spoon in my mouth, I can’t afford to be idle. Well, to be brief, something that will suit me has come in my way, and I have snatched at the chance. The affair will be settled to-morrow. Near the theatre in which I made my first and last appearance in the new and original drama which was played for the first and last time, is a theatrical wig and hair shop, with a shaving connection attached. To-morrow that shop and that connection will be mine. That’s the head and front of

my story. But there's something more. I have a friend of yours to thank for it all."

"A friend of mine!"

"Two, I may say—one fair, one dark. I do perceive here a divided duty. But we'll speak of that anon."

"No; tell me now. What friends do you mean? I haven't many."

"You have one who stands for a host. If she were such a friend to me, I wouldn't call the king my uncle."

"She!"

"I see you must hear it. Briefly, then, this was the way of it. The business was for sale, Chris, my boy. Money had to be paid for it—not much, but too much for a poor actor whose purse has always resembled a sieve. I had saved a little, but not more than half what was required for the purchase of the goodwill. I mention this in the presence of these friends of yours——"

I interrupted him.

"Don't let us have any mystery, Turk. Who are they?"

“Jessie the peerless and Mr. Glover.”

I started. Turk continued :

“I mention this in their presence, and lament my impecuniosity. Jessie sympathises with me—wishes that *she* had money, so that she might help me. She has a heart of gold, Chris, my boy, a heart of gold. Two or three days afterwards, Mr. Glover sends for me—says he has been considering the matter, and that he is disposed to assist me. He goes further than being disposed to do it—he does it. In short, he provides half the purchase-money, and there we are. It is a matter of business, Chris, my boy. I asked him to make a matter of business of it, and he said he intended to do so ; and he has. Mr. Glover is a money-lender, and he lends me the money at ten per cent. But there’s one thing I’m certain of. He wouldn’t have done it but for Jessie.”

I reflected with some bitterness on this information.

“Are you certain of that, Turk ?”

“Morally certain, that is all. For when I thanked Jessie, she modestly averred that all that she did was to express a wish that she had a friend who would assist me. And now, Chris, my boy, unbosom yourself. What’s your trouble?”

“Jessie has left our house, Turk.”

He gave me a look of deep concern. “What do you mean by that, Chris, my son?”

“She has left us, never to return—left us suddenly, without explanation.”

And then I narrated to him, in detail, all that had occurred, omitting only what had passed between me and uncle Bryan. Still when I mentioned his name, which was necessary several times in the course of my narration, I spoke of him with sufficient bitterness to make Turk aware of the terms upon which we stood to each other. Turk, growing more and more serious as I proceeded, listened to me without interruption, and pondered deeply. By the time I had finished he had become very

serious indeed, and there was an air of gloom upon him which somewhat soothed me.

“There is more in *this* than meets the eye,” he said; and added, somewhat unnecessarily as I thought, “Bear with me a little while, Chris, my boy,” for I felt that such a request more properly belonged to me than to him. But he explained his meaning presently.

“You have given me your confidence, Chris, my boy, and you want me to stand by you.”

“I do, Turk.”

“And I *will* stand by you, as you have stood by me—I don’t forget the big stick you bought, Chris, to assist me on a certain eventful night”—(here I was stung reproachfully by the remembrance of my cowardly behaviour on that night); “nor other occasions at the Royal Columbia when you led the applause like a true friend. I’ll stand by you, my boy, but you must first hear my confession.”

I did not wish to hear *his* confession; I wished to continue talking only of myself and Jessie, but I was bound to listen.

“As before, Chris, in a very few words. I knew that you loved Jessie, but I scarcely thought that your passion was as strong as it is—as powerful, as deep——”

“No words can express its strength and depth, Turk,” I said, in a tone of gloomy satisfaction.

He nodded, as if he fully understood me, and continued: “Well, others may love as well as you, Chris.” I looked at him in jealous curiosity. “I shouldn’t be true to you nor to myself if I didn’t confess it before we proceed to the consideration of the state of affairs. *I* love her, also.”

I started, and let go his arm.

“Don’t do that, Chris, my boy,” said the honest fellow; “it’s nobody’s fault but my own. I know that I can’t stand in comparison with you. You are ten years younger than I am—you are handsome, clever, bright; and I—well, I am a failure. That’s what I

am, Chris ; a failure. Even if you were out of the way, which I don't for one moment wish, curious as it may sound, I think I should stand but a poor chance with such a beautiful creature as she is. I am not a hundredth part good enough for her."

"No one is, Turk," I said, somewhat mollified.

"No ; I won't say that. I think that some one whom I know *is* good enough" (he pressed my arm sympathisingly) ; "and, besides, you have a claim upon her. You mustn't be surprised or hurt at my loving her, Chris ; I could mention half a dozen others who are in the same boat. You see, one can't help loving her, she is so bright and winsome. Why, if she were mine—which she isn't, and never will be—I think I should take a pride in knowing it, for it would make her all the more precious to me. That is how the matter stands with me, Chris, and I think it's right that you should know it. I give her up, not without a pang, my boy, but freely ; I am used to disappoint-

ments, and I shall bear this as I have borne others."

"But you never had any hope, Turk," I said, disposed, after his magnanimous conduct, to argue the matter with him.

"No, not to speak of," he replied, with a melancholy sigh. "If I can't be Jessie's lover—don't be angry with me for using the word—I can be her friend, and yours. It rests with you to say the word. If you know enough of Turk West to trust him, say so, Chris, and he pledges himself to act faithfully in your interest. He may be of more use to you than you imagine. Well?"

"I should be an ungrateful brute not to say that I accept your offer thankfully, Turk."

"That's settled, then. Shake hands on it. And now, Chris, we'll be silent for just two minutes, and then we'll go into the matter."

At the end of that time he resumed.

"I said that there was more in your story than meets the eye, Chris, my boy; and there is. Jessie disappears on her birthday, suddenly, without any forewarning.

This morning everything was nice and pleasant with all of you at home."

"With the exception of uncle Bryan," I interrupted; "you musn't forget that."

"I don't forget it, but then he is the same as he usually is, and there's nothing unusual in that. She is affectionate to you; she is affectionate to your mother; and I think that she couldn't have avoided seeing that there was to be a little celebration of her birthday to-night. Well, it is plain to me that this morning she had no idea of going away. Now what has occurred since this morning to cause this sudden change in her? That's the first thing to consider."

I could not think of anything. Jessie had not been out of our house.

"There's something I have not told you, Turk, but I don't see what it can have to do with Jessie's going from us. We were talking together once, when Jessie said that she wondered that I had never asked her any questions about herself — she meant about herself before she came to live with us. I

answered that mother had desired me not to do so, because uncle Bryan might not like it."

"What had he to do with it?" asked Turk.

"I don't know, but mother said he might have secrets which he did not wish us to discover. When I told this to Jessie, she said that she had a secret, but didn't then know what it was. It was in a letter which she was not to open until she was eighteen years of age—until to-day. Then she said she would tell me everything."

"There's a mystery somewhere," said Turk, pondering; "in that letter perhaps."

But I could not agree with him. Eager as I was to receive any impressions which would divert my suspicions from the current in which they were running, I could not see the slightest connection between the circumstance I had just mentioned and Jessie's absence. By this time we were at Temple Bar.

"Where are we going?" asked Turk.

“To Mr. Rackstraw’s,” I answered. “Jessie has been taking lessons of him, you know. He may be able to tell us something about her.”

Turk shook his head. “There are two strong reasons against the realisation of that expectation, Chris. First, Jessie has not been there to-day, according to your own statement; second, Mr. Rackstraw’s office closes at five o’clock.”

“But we may be able to discover where Mr. Rackstraw lives.”

“Well?”

“Well?” I echoed, irritated at his seeming discouragement of my plan. “Turk, can’t you see that I’m almost mad with misery. I thought you were a friend——”

“And am I not? That’s news to Turk. What good can you do by finding out Mr. Rackstraw’s private address?”

“He may tell me where Mr. Glover lives.”

“And then?” demanded Turk, in a grave and sorrowful tone.

I turned from him petulantly. “If you

do not care to understand me," I said, "I had best go alone."

I walked swiftly onwards towards Mr. Rackstraw's office, Turk following me at a distance of a few paces.

Mr. Rackstraw's office was situated in a quiet narrow street in the rear of Covent Garden. It was closed, as I expected it would be, and although I rang all the bells on the door for fully ten minutes, I received no answer. Turk stood quietly near me, without speaking. I was heartily ashamed of myself for my treatment of him, and I made an attempt at reconciliation by holding out my hand to him as I turned disconsolately from Mr. Rackstraw's door. He took my hand with affectionate eagerness.

"I can't find it in my heart," he said, with rough tenderness, "to be angry with you; but I ought to be."

"I *am* ashamed of myself for behaving so badly to you, Turk, but I couldn't help it. I think I am ready to do any mad or foolish thing."

“Oh, I don’t care about myself. I have a stronger reason for being angry with you. Who of we two should be Jessie’s champion? You, I should say. Yet I am obliged to defend her from your suspicions. If you were ten years older than you are, I should quarrel with you, Chris; I would with any other man who dared to say a word against her.”

“Who has said anything against her?” I demanded hotly.

“You, in coupling her name with Mr. Glover—you, even in the expression of the idea that Mr. Glover has had anything to do with her disappearance. I don’t want you to be ashamed of yourself for treating me badly, but you ought to be for your suspicions of her.”

“You don’t know what I know, Turk. I am bringing no charge against Jessie—God forbid that I should; I love her too well, and think of her too highly. But Mr. Glover has been paying court to her from the first day he set eyes on her.”

“What if he has? Is that her fault? Aren’t you old enough yet to know that there are hundreds of men always ready to run after a pretty girl? Now, I daresay it has hurt you to hear that Mr. Glover has helped me into my new business because Jessie expressed a wish that she had a friend who would assist me. Why, what was more natural than that she should say so, out of her kind heart, and what was more natural than that he should be glad of the opportunity of obliging her, and of doing a fair stroke of business at the same time? It isn’t a large sum that he advances—a matter of seventy-five pounds only, and he has a bill of sale, and goodness knows what all, for security. Now you are better satisfied perhaps. I can’t say that I am over-fond of Mr. Glover, but he is said to be an honourable, straightforward man. I’ll tell you what I’ll do, if you must see him——”

“I must,” I said firmly.

“I don’t know where he lives, but I’ll take you to a theatre that he often pops

into of an evening ; he may be there. The acting-manager is one of my new friends, and will pass us in, I daresay, or will be able to tell us if Mr. Glover is in the theatre."

CHAPTER IV.

MR. GLOVER DECLINES TO SATISFY ME.

THE friend to whom Turk referred was, fortunately for us, in the lobby of the theatre, and as the two were engaged in conversation, the man I came to seek lounged towards us. He seemed surprised to see me, but approached me quite affably, and asked what I was doing in *his* part of the world so late in the night. I made some sort of awkward, bungling answer, and then he recognised Turk.

“You, too, Turk,” he said, in his slow way; “but that is natural, for these are your quarters now. Let me see. You take possession to-morrow?”

Yes, Turk answered, everything was

settled, and he went into his new place of business early in the morning.

“And how is business with you?” asked Mr. Glover, directing his attention to me again.

I answered that it was very good, and that I had nothing to complain of in that respect.

“You have nothing to complain of in that respect,” he said, glancing from me to Turk and from Turk to me, and appearing to be seeking for some solution of the circumstance that we were in company together. When he was in any doubt, he had an irritating habit of repeating the last words spoken by the person he was conversing with, which gave him time to think of his own words in reply. “That must be very satisfactory. I hear good accounts of you. You will get on, I should say, if you are steady and straightforward, and if you keep a good name. That is everything in this world. A good name—a good name. But what brings *you* out to-night? Have *you* business in this quarter too?”

"No," I said, "I did not come out for business."

"You did not come out for business. For pleasure, then. Well, young men will be young men."

"To tell you the truth, sir, I said——"

"That's right, always tell the truth," he interrupted, speaking from a height, slowly, and coolly, and patronisingly, as though he were truth's conservator, and was glad to hear that it was being practised. "Yes, to tell me the truth——"

"I came out partly for the purpose and in the hope of seeing you."

With his hand playing with his moustache, he looked not at me, but at Turk, for an explanation. Turk, however, had nothing to say.

"You came out for the purpose and in the hope of seeing me. Yes. Have you brought me any message?"

"Did you expect one, sir?" I asked quickly.

"Did I expect one? No, I cannot really

say that I did ; but I should not have been surprised. Go on," he said, with gentle encouragement.

There were some persons passing us occasionally, and I moved to a more retired spot. I saw that he was curious, and I saw that his curiosity increased at this movement.

"You seem agitated," he said. "Turk, our young friend here seems agitated. Take your time—take your time. If you are going to beg a favour, I shall be glad to assist you in any way in my power—in any way in my power."

"I have not come to beg any favour of you, sir. I only came to ask——"

But I hesitated here ; the justice of Turk's reproach came upon me with great force, and I was conscious that the words I was about to utter might be construed into an ungenerous suspicion of Jessie. If they reached her ears from the lips of one who was not well disposed towards me, I should sink for ever in her esteem.

"Take time—take time," said Mr. Glover, outwardly quite at his ease.

Turk came to my rescue here. He divined my thoughts, and the cause of my hesitation.

"Perhaps, Mr. Glover," said Turk, "if you would not mind regarding what passes as confidential, and not to be mentioned to any one else, Christopher would be more at his ease."

I gave Turk a grateful look.

"Christopher would be more at his ease," repeated Mr. Glover. "This really is very mysterious. I don't see any objection. Then you know what he is going to say?"

"I know the subject he wishes to speak upon—but I was not aware of it when I first came out with him to-night."

"Is it such a subject as ought to be spoken of in confidence between us?"

He totally ignored me, as if my opinion on the point were of the smallest possible value.

"I think so," replied Turk, "if it be spoken of at all."

“You have your doubts as to the judiciousness of the communication our young friend is about to make?”

“I have; and I have told him so.”

“Oh, you have told him so.”

He appeared to me to debate within himself whether, under such circumstances, he should listen any further; but his curiosity overcame his evident wish to baulk me.

“You may go on,” he said to me, with a condescending wave of his hand.

“It is understood, then,” I said, “some-what more boldly, “that what we say to each other is quite private, and will not be repeated?”

He stared at me very haughtily, and bent his head, and stood before me, with his fingers to his lips, waiting for me to speak. A singular fancy occurred to me at this moment as I gazed at him—a fancy which need not here be mentioned; it lingered in my mind then and afterwards, although I strove to dismiss it on this occasion, as being utterly wild and out of all reason. But, in

conjunction with another circumstance, which came to light in the course of time, it led to a strange discovery.

"I have not come to make any communication," I said; "I have only come to ask a question. I can speak more freely now, as you are a gentleman, and as what I say will not reach her ears." (His lips repeated "Her ears," but he did not repeat the words aloud.) "It is about Miss Trim"——

"About Jessie," he said, in a lighter tone. "Yes; what about her?"

"Do you know where she is?"

His looks were disturbed now, although he strove to be cool.

"Do I know where she is?" he repeated, with a contraction of his eyes.

"That is what I have come to ask."

"Oh, that is what you have come to ask."

"There is no need for me to repeat the question, I suppose," I said, controlling my desire to strike at him, for his manner was in the last degree contemptuous, notwith-

standing that the interest he took in the conversation was evidently strengthened.

"No; I understand the English language, and *you* will be kind enough to understand that I am not in the habit of being questioned. There is no need for you to repeat the question, but there is a need for my asking why it is put to me."

"Then you do not know?"

He would not give me the satisfaction of a simple answer.

"Let me see," he said, in a musing tone, "to-day is her birthday."

"You do know that."

"She told me herself; these things are not guessed at."

"You have not answered my question," I said, trembling from passion and from a sense of helplessness.

"You have not answered mine," he replied. "I ask you why you put it to me?"

Turk motioned to me that I ought to tell him, but I could not speak.

"Perhaps I had best explain," Turk then

said. "This is Jessie's birthday, as you know, and Christopher and his mother had prepared a little feast in honour of it."

"After the manner of such people," observed Mr. Glover, with a sneer and a laugh, which set my pulses beating more quickly. Turk took no notice of the observation.

"My sister Josey was invited, to please Jessie, and Chris had a little present to give her——"

"Exceedingly pretty and pathetic," interrupted Mr. Glover. "It would make a charming domestic scene in poor life, if it were placed on the stage. These commonplace circumstances tickle the fancy, and please sentimental persons, whenever they are presented in an unreal form. In real life, of course, there is nothing very attractive in them—often the reverse, I should say. But the picture you have drawn would be a failure even on the stage, with nothing exciting to follow. We want a 'situation,' Turk."

"We have one ready," responded Turk.

“Without warning, and most strangely and suddenly, Jessie leaves her home. Her friends suppose she has gone out for a walk, and are waiting for her with uneasiness, which grows stronger as the time goes on and Jessie does not return. While they are waiting, a letter comes——”

“Are you concocting a plot?” asked Mr. Glover.

“I am telling you exactly what has occurred. A letter is received from Jessie, in which she says that she has gone away, and never intends to return. Chris, in his anxiety, has come to see you, in the hope—or the fear—of hearing some news of her.”

I had been watching Mr. Glover’s face all the time Turk was speaking, but it was impossible for me to decide whether he was acting or not. The only change I observed in him occurred during Turk’s last words; then a little light came into his eyes, which might have been construed into an expression of triumph.

“And Chris, in his anxiety,” he said, “has

come to see me in the hope—or the fear—of hearing some news of her. Which is it?” he asked, turning to me; “hope or fear?”

“Fear,” I replied, unhesitatingly.

“What do you suspect me of?” he continued, politely; “of running away with her? You don’t answer. Afraid to put it into words. But that’s the plain English of it, isn’t it? You did a wise thing in stipulating that what passes between us is to be kept private, or I might have been tempted to tell the young lady in question something which would not be pleasant for her to hear. Had you known what is due to a gentleman from one in your station of life, I might have been induced to satisfy your inexplicable anxiety concerning her; as it is, I decline to do so. She would be both amused and angry to learn that you have set up some sort of a claim upon her, as if there could be any community of feeling between you. You seem to forget that she is a lady, and that you—well, that you are not a gentleman. Take this piece of advice from one who is

competent to give it—go home and stick to your bench, and don't presume to cast your thoughts on what is not only beyond your reach, but immeasurably above you. Good-night, Turk."

And with a contemptuous glance at me, Mr. Glover strolled away in a very leisurely manner.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW FEAR.

I WALKED home in the most sorrowful of moods. Turk accompanied me part of the way, but when he began to speak in Mr. Glover's favour, I said that I would prefer to walk by myself. The good fellow took the hint, and would not notice my churlishness.

"I know, I know, old fellow," he said, shaking hands with me; "but you might count me as nobody. Never mind, Chris, my boy, you won't find many better friends than Turk West; and he's not to be shaken off, let me tell you."

I reflected with bitterness that I had not one friend who thought as I thought.

Everybody was against me, and I was distrusted and misunderstood even by those who should have held to me most closely. I walked for miles out of my way, almost blindly, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling nothing, but my own despair and grief. The streets were very still as I approached our house, and I lingered about the spots where Jessie and I had lingered and talked in the days that were gone.

Josey West opened the door for me. Her face was very grave.

"Well?" she said.

"I have heard nothing, Josey. She has not come home?"

"No."

A peculiar accent in her voice struck me.

"How is mother?" I asked.

She closed her lips firmly, and looked at me seriously and reproachfully. I rebelled against that look; my heart was full almost to bursting.

"Why don't you and those who were my friends say what you think of me?" I de-

manded bitterly. "Why don't you say at once that I am to blame for all that has occurred, and that I, and I only, am the cause of all this misery."

"I don't say so," she replied gently, "because I don't think so."

"But you look at me as if it were so," I said loudly; "you and all the others. You have fair words and fair excuses for every one but me——"

She placed her fingers on her lips. "Hush!" she said; "don't be cruel as well as unjust."

Her hand was on my arm, and I shook it off roughly. "Who is the just one? Uncle Bryan? I will talk to you no more. How is mother?"

"Go up and see; but tread softly. You are not the only sufferer—remember that."

I went up-stairs, and into my mother's room softly. Josey West followed me.

"Mother," I said.

She opened her eyes and looked at me vacantly. She did not know me; even

when I took her hand, and fondled it in mine, she showed no sign of recognition. Then a feeling of desolation, more terrible than any pain I had yet suffered, entered my heart, and I fell on my knees by her side. Was I to lose her next? It seemed so. Her white pitiful face, her parched restless lips, her mournful eyes gazing on vacancy, her hot skin, were like so many tongues reproaching me for my selfishness.

“For God’s sake tell me, Josey,” I whispered, “how long has she been like this?”

“The change came a little while after the doctor left. She bore up while he was here, and tried to answer him cheerfully; but when he was gone, she broke down.”

“Did she speak, Josey?”

“A little at first.”

“What about?”

“Only about you, Chris; but I cannot tell you what she said. They were only broken words of tenderness ——” Josey turned from me, and could not continue for her tears.

“Did you not go for the doctor again, Josey?”

“I could not leave her, Chris.”

“Uncle Bryan might have gone——”

“I knocked at his door, and called him again and again; but I got no answer.”

I went at once to his room, and knocked, but no answer came. I tried the handle, and found that the door was unlocked. I entered the room, and struck a light. Uncle Bryan was not there, and his bed had not been lain upon. I went down-stairs into my own bedroom, and searched the house swiftly; uncle Bryan was not in it.

“Did you see him go out, Josey?”

“No; I have not seen him since you left.”

“I must run for the doctor. Will you stop here?”

“I’ll stop, Chris, and do all I can to help you.”

I pressed her hand, and within half an hour the doctor was at my mother’s bedside. I waited below until he came down.

“If you will walk back with me,” he said,

"I will give you some medicine for your mother."

"Is she very ill, sir?"

"Very."

My heart sank as I asked, "Dangerously?"

"I think so, but we shall know more in a day or two."

"Then there is no immediate danger, sir?"

"I think not—I think not; but we must be prepared for the worst."

He said something more than this, but I did not hear him. A mist stole upon my senses, for his quiet tone portended the worst.

"Bear up, Mr. Carey," he said; "you must not give way. We will do our best. A great deal will depend upon good nursing. That is a sensible little woman who is with her now."

This doctor was a man who was deservedly worshipped by the poor in our neighbourhood; his life was really one of self-sacrifice, for he was a capable man, was paid badly, worked hard, and did his duty bravely.

“Can you tell me what she is suffering from, sir?”

“I was about to ask you that question myself,” was his reply. “All that I know at present is that she is in a high state of fever, that her blood is thin and poor, and that she is as weak as a human being dare be who requires strength to battle successfully with disease. It appears to me that she must have been suffering for some time, for a very long time probably—but I am in the dark as to that—and that she has at length given way. If you put upon a beam a pressure greater than it can bear, the beam must break.”

“But I do not think my mother has worked too hard, sir.”

“The mind has acted upon the body. Hard physical work itself seldom, if ever, kills. In the case of this beam—you follow me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“In the case of this beam, there have been secret inroads upon its power of resist-

ance, and the wood has rotted. I have seen stout planks cut through, and colonies of little insects bared to the light which have been steadily and surely eating away its strength. I am speaking plainly, because I think it is the best course in all these cases, and when I am speaking to a sensible man."

"Thank you, sir; I should prefer to hear the truth, terrible though it be."

"Outwardly, these planks seem capable of bearing any pressure, but when a great trial comes, they must give way. There are thousands and thousands of human beings walking about, in seemingly good health, in precisely the same condition. Has your mother suffered any great trouble?"

"A great trouble has come upon us within the last few hours."

"An unexpected trouble?"

"Totally unexpected, sir."

"For which you were quite unprepared?"

"Quite, sir."

"That may be the immediate, but is not

the direct, cause of your mother's illness. She has been enduring a long strain, as I have said, and has at length broken down under it." By this time we were in his shop, and he was preparing the medicine. "You look ill yourself. Let me feel your pulse." He looked me steadily in the face. "You are your mother's only child, I believe. Miss West led me to infer as much."

"She was right, sir."

"Well, then," he said, giving me a rough and kindly shake, "your mother's ultimate recovery may—I only say *may*—depend upon you. Think of that, and don't be falling ill yourself."

"I'll try not to," I murmured, for I felt sick and faint.

"Drink this," he said, pouring out a draught for me; "it will revive you. You will try not to? Nay, you must make up your mind not to, for your mother's sake. We never know what we can do. Why, we can conquer pain, if we are strong-willed.

enough. I was explaining about your mother.. She is so delicately and exquisitely susceptible, that to have those about her whom she loves may contribute more to her recovery than anything all the doctors in London could do. She is in a state of delirium at present; under the most favourable circumstances, she is likely to remain in this state for a week or two, probably for longer. If, when she recovers her senses, the first face she looks upon and recognises is a face that she loves, it may not only contribute to her recovery, it may accomplish it. On the other hand, if she misses a face that is dear to her, and that she has been accustomed to see about her, it may cause a relapse, and prove fatal. I have tried to make myself clear, and to give you a good reason why you must keep well. Don't mope. If you have any private grief of your own, keep it under until this peril is past."

I thanked him, and left him. I told Josey West exactly what the doctor had said, and she returned the compliment he had paid her.

of calling her a sensible little woman, by saying that he was a sensible man.

"And now, Chris," she said, "you must go to bed."

I said that I would sit up with my mother, and tried to persuade Josey to lie down; but she refused, saying rest was more necessary to me than to her.

"In the first place, you have your work to do; that must not be neglected for all the Jessie Trims in the world. Oh, yes, my dear! You may shake your head, but I've been remarkably quiet all through, and I think I'm entitled to say a few words."

"I'll not stop to hear anything spoken against her," I said.

"That's right. Fly up. You think you're fonder of her than I am. That you can't be. But I'm not satisfied with her, and I sha'n't be until I get all this explained. There's something behind it that neither you nor I suspect, or my name isn't Josey West."

"That's what Turk says," I interposed.

"I expect you've been leading him a fine

life to-night. Poor Turk ! Why, he worships the ground she walks upon ! I tell you what it is, my sweet child," she said sarcastically, "there are many things you might learn with advantage to yourself and others. But to come back. There's some mystery behind all this ; but it might be one thing, and it might be another. I'm in a whirl, that's what I am, my dear."

I really think Josey administered these words to me as a kind of medicine. But she could not deceive me as to the feelings she entertained for Jessie. If any person had dared in her presence to say a word against her friend, she would have been the first to defend her.

"Josey," I said, "I shall feel much relieved if you will promise me one thing."

"That depends. I'm not going to open my mouth and shut my eyes."

"If Jessie tells you the reason of her going away——"

"Which she's sure to do. Oh, I shall know all about it."

“And if the knowledge does not come to me in any other way, will you tell me?”

“Upon my word! Me tell a secret? Not for all the world, master Chris.”

“But if it’s not a secret?”

“Then of course you’ll hear it.” We spoke in an undertone, so as not to disturb my mother, who lay unconscious of what was going on around her. “But here you are stopping up,” continued Josey fretfully, “when every minute’s rest is precious to you and all of us. I have only told you one of my reasons why you *must* be fresh in the morning—and mind you sleep, master Chris, when you get to bed. I’ll tell you another. There’ll be the shop to look after.”

“That’s uncle Bryan’s business,” I replied, flushing with anger. The mere mention of his name aroused all my bitterness against him. “If mother could be moved from this house to-morrow with safety, I’d take her out of his sight without a moment’s delay.”

“You’ll not see your uncle Bryan again in a hurry,” said Josey. “You mark my words—he’s gone for good.”

I did not stop to discuss the point, but went to the bedside and kissed my mother. As I leant over her, I could scarcely hear her breathing, and but for a light convulsive sob which rose to her throat every now and then, and which she seemed to make an effect to check, it would have been difficult to detect any sign of life in her. The doctor’s words dwelt in my mind as I gazed at her beloved face, and for the first time in my life I appreciated at their proper worth the sacrifices which this dearest of women had made for one so unworthy as I. I knelt at her bedside, and prayed that her life might be spared to me—prayed with humble heart—and my tears flowed freely.

Josey was outside on the landing.

“Good-night, my dear,” she said; “give me a kiss.”

Mine were not the only tears on my face as I walked down-stairs.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT THE NEIGHBOURS SAID.

JOSEY WEST's prediction proved to be right. When I rose the next morning uncle Bryan had not returned. Josey, looking as fresh as though she had had a good night's rest, told me that there had been no change in my mother's condition—that only a few words had passed her lips, and that those words were about me.

“There's a lot to do,” she said ; “you've got your work to look after, the shop must be attended to, and there's your mother to nurse. I really think, my dear, that if your uncle doesn't make his appearance we had best take possession of the place. Two things we must be careful of—we mustn't let the business be

ruined, and we must try to keep the neighbours from talking of what has occurred. When a lot of gossiping women get hold of a woman's name, with a story attached to it, they tear that woman's name to pieces with as much pleasure as they would eat a good dinner ; and as for the story, my dear, when you hear it the next day you wouldn't know it, they twist and mangle it so. Stop here while I run round to my house ; I sha'n't be gone ten minutes."

During Josey's absence the doctor came.

"Your mother is no worse," he said, after his examination ; "but I am not satisfied with her condition ; it puzzles me. I can say nothing at present except that rest and freedom from agitation are imperative ; there must be no noise in the house, no voices raised in anger, nothing that can in any way disturb her. Her life may depend upon it."

By this I knew that he must have heard something more of what had taken place than what I had told him. Indeed, the gossips of the neighbourhood had commenced their

work. I have puzzled my head many times to discover by what means they knew what they knew, but it was and is a mystery to me. They were familiar with matters which I had supposed no person outside our little circle could possibly be acquainted with. They knew that uncle Bryan and I were at daggers drawn, and that there had been a desperate quarrel between us ; they knew that he had left the house, that Jessie had run away on her birthday, and that my mother was lying dangerously ill. Being in possession of these bare bones, they put them together with amazing ingenuity, and produced the most astounding results. The first thing they settled was, that uncle Bryan and I had quarrelled, not alone with our tongues, but with our hands ; and one of the pictures which grew out of the story as it was related by one to another represented uncle Bryan lying on the ground and me standing over him with a knife, while Josey West was rushing between us to prevent murder being done. Another picture represented uncle Bryan

packing up in a handkerchief all his treasure in money (for, strange to say, I now learned for the first time that he bore the reputation of a miser, and that it was generally supposed he had large sums of money concealed), and stealing off in the dead of night in fear of his life. Another, and the worst, picture concerned Jessie and Mr. Glover. Mr. Glover, an enormously rich gentleman, had fallen desperately in love with Jessie, and she had consented to elope with him. The gossips gloated over the details. A carriage with a pair of grey horses was waiting at the corner of a certain street (name given) about a quarter of a mile away; Mr. Glover, in a large cloak, was on the watch at the appointed time; Jessie made her appearance, with a small bundle in her hand wrapped in a handkerchief; Mr. Glover lifted her into the carriage, jumped in after her, and away they whirled. Even if they had been inclined to doubt the truth of this story (which they were not), it was impossible for them to do so, because of the exact and won-

derful details which accompanied its relation. There were a coachman and a footman dressed in such and such a way, down to their very buttons; the carriage was painted blue, with edgings of yellow; Mr. Glover wore a smoking-cap, and his cloak had a fur collar, and two gold tassels attached to it. This cloak gave an air of mysterious romance to the picture, and added much to the enjoyment of it. It is worthy of notice that both uncle Bryan and Jessie left our house with something done up in a pocket-handkerchief. This occurs to me as an arbitrary feature in the painting of such pictures; and I have no doubt that, had a dozen persons been missing, each would have been portrayed as stealing away with something done up in a pocket-handkerchief in his hand.

Before the day was out, the whole neighbourhood was busy talking over these stories, and discussing their probable results.

Josey had returned within the ten minutes, and brought with her Matty and Rosy. The shop was opened, and a more than usually

brisk business was done, in consequence of gossips dropping in to pick up information; but I resolutely refused to go behind the counter. I would have nothing to do with it. I had already saved a little purse of money, and my earnings were good. I was determined to have no further connection with uncle Bryan in any shape or way whatever.

“Then I *must* take possession,” observed Josey, after listening to my views, which I expressed in most unmistakable terms. “It would be a pity to let such a business go to rack and ruin. If your uncle Bryan returns, I shall be able to render a proper account.”

She entered upon this as she entered upon everything else, with intense and thorough earnestness, and the business was carried on, and the duties of the house performed, as though nothing of importance had occurred to disturb them. She might have been born a grocer for the intimate knowledge she displayed of the requirements of the trade. When I expressed my astonishment, she said philosophically :

“My dear, nothing’s difficult. One can do anything if one makes up one’s mind to do it. All one has got to do is to go about it willingly.”

In the meantime I looked out anxiously for news of Jessie, but on the first day of her absence I learnt nothing. I went to Mr. Rackstraw’s in the afternoon to make inquiries, but he received me coldly, and desired me not to call again—in such terms that I was certain Mr. Glover had made him my enemy. Then I went to Turk’s new shop, and found him very busy, and sanguine of his prospects. But as he had no news of Jessie I listened to his relation of his plans with small interest.

“I shall be able to serve you, Chris,” he said, before I went away; “I shall keep my eyes open.”

That night I sat up with my mother until three o’clock, when Josey relieved me. My mother did not know me, and although I strove hard to make her recognise me, her eyes dwelt on my face as they would have

done on the face of a stranger. What pain and grief this brought to me I cannot describe.

There was something different in the arrangement of the room, and I made a remark concerning it to Josey. The room was clearer, lighter. Josey explained it to me in a sharp tone, as though she desired not to be questioned.

"The doctor said the room must be made as airy as possible; he doesn't want a lot of lumber about."

But the next morning it occurred to me that the box in which Jessie kept her clothes and knick-knacks had been taken out of the room. I looked about the house for it, but could not find it.

"Where is Jessie's box, Josey?" I asked.

"Gone," was the short and snappish reply.

"Gone where?"

"Well, I suppose you must be told. While you were away yesterday, Jessie sent for it."

"Then you know where she is," I cried

excitedly, jumping to my feet, and tearing off my working-coat.

"Yes, I know where she is."

I waited, but Josey did not volunteer further information. I looked at her reproachfully.

"I'll just tell you as much as I'm compelled to, master Christopher, and no more. I had a letter from Jessie yesterday—Oh, no; you'll not see it! It was meant for my own eyes, and no others. I said that Jessie would tell me the reason of her going away, and she has done so; and I know where she is, and I've sent her clothes and all her things to her. And that's all, master Christopher."

"No, it isn't all, Josey. You will tell me something more. If I'm not to know where she is——"

"Which you are not," Josey interrupted; "not from me at least."

"I may know whether she is well."

"Yes, she is well in health."

"And happy?"

"I don't know ; I can't tell."

"Did she do right in going away ?"

She answered me in precisely the same words.

"I don't know ; I can't tell."

"Is she stopping with friends ?"

"Yes, she is stopping with friends."

"But what friends can she have that we don't know of ?"

"Ah," exclaimed Josey, more snappishly than before, "what friends, I wonder ?"

"Josey," I said, coaxingly, putting my arm round her waist,

"I tell you what it is, master Christopher. If you ask me many more questions, I shall run away ;" but in spite of her assumed severity, her tone softened.

"I won't ask you any more, Josey," I said, and I felt the tears rising to my eyes, "but you might have some pity for me."

"Bless the dear child !" she said, with a motherly air, "I *have* some pity for you ! Why, you stupid boy, I'm as fond of you as though you were my own brother !"

"Then tell me if it was because of me Jessie went away."

"You had nothing to do with it."

It was a relief to me to hear this, for I had in some way got it in my mind that Jessie had run away to escape the proposal she suspected I intended to make to her. I approached a more delicate subject.

"You have heard the stories the neighbours are telling each other, Josey, about Jessie and Mr. Glover."

"Oh, yes, I've heard them! The scandal-mongers! I'd like to wring their ears for them."

That was sufficient for me; a great weight was lifted from my heart. There was another question that I must ask.

"Did Jessie in her letter say anything about me? Did she send me any message?"

"She did, and I wasn't to give it to you unless you asked for it. Perhaps I'd better read it." She took the letter from her pocket, and read: "'Chris will be sure to miss my box'—you see," said Josey, interrupting

her reading, "Jessie sent the letter to my house; she didn't know I was here; and I was to ask your mother to let me have her box, so that I might send it to Jessie without your knowing."

"Then there's a message to mother in that letter?"

"There is, but I can't give it to her, poor dear!"

"Go on with what Jessie says about me, Josey."

"Chris will be sure to miss my box, and if he asks you if I have sent him any message, say that I hope he will not try to discover where I am, and that I hope also he will not think worse of me than I am. If we meet again——" here Josey broke off with, "But that's not for you, I should say."

"It *must* be for me, Josey. You have no right to keep it from me."

"Well, if you will have it. 'If we meet again, it must be at my own time and in my own way. Whether I am right or wrong in what I have done and what I intend to

do, I have quite made up my mind, and no one can advise me.' Now I hope you are satisfied."

I was compelled to be. There were both balm and gall in the letter—balm because the tales that slanderous tongues were circulating were false, and gall because Jessie had written in such a manner as to give me but little hope that she reciprocated my love. If she loved me, she would have confided in me. Is it possible, I reflected with bitterness, that she could have led me on, knowing my feelings towards her, and making light of them? But the thought was transient; I would not entertain it. It would be a shame on my manhood to doubt her. What if she were not for me—would that prove her unworthy? But it was bitter to bear, and the scalding tears ran from my eyes as I laid my head on my mother's pillow. My sobs disturbed her, and she moved her fingers feebly towards my neck. It was the first sign of recognition she had displayed since her illness. I fondled her poor thin hand, and

kissed it, and moved close to her lips, for she was murmuring faint words. But these words were addressed not to me, but to my father, who had been dead for so many years. She was speaking to him of their darling boy, and of the happiness he would be to them when he grew to be a man. I listened sadly; every soft word she murmured was a dagger in my heart, for I was beginning to learn the strength of her love and the weakness of mine. Heavy as was the blow which had fallen upon me, I felt that there might be comfort and peace even yet for me, if my mother lived to enjoy the outward evidences of my penitence and love, and that a curse indeed must fall upon my life if she died without blessing me.

CHAPTER VII.

JOSEY WEST DECLARES THAT SHE HAS GOT
INTO HER PROPER GROOVE.

A WEEK had passed, and there was still no change in my mother's condition. Every time the doctor visited her, his manner became more serious. The shadow of death seemed to hang already over the house.

"Her strength will not hold out for another week, I am afraid." He spoke these words to Josey West, out of my hearing, as he thought.

I followed him from the house.

"I heard what you said to Miss West," I said to him. "Is all hope really gone? Can nothing be done?"

He did not reply immediately, and before he spoke he took my arm kindly.

“This is one of the cases outside my experience. Your mother has nothing that a physician can grapple with. She has no organic disease that I can discover, and although physically she is fearfully weak, it is mental suffering that is killing her. It is not usual for a doctor to speak as plainly as I am speaking to you, but it is best to do so. I have heard so much that is good and noble in your mother’s life, that it would rejoice me exceedingly to see her rise from her bed in health.”

“No one but I can know how tender and beautiful her life has been,” I said, with sobs. “If I could give my life for hers, I would resign it with cheerfulness.”

“But I suspect,” said the doctor, with a curiously observant air upon him, “that that is just the thing that would be most effectual in killing her. Come, now, recover yourself: I have something to say to you. I shall count a hundred, and then I shall go on. . . . When you first consulted me, and I asked you what your mother was

suffering from, I seriously meant it. I want to cure your mother, or at all events to show you the way to do it, for I have an idea that you, not I, must be the doctor. I will make you a present of all my little fees in this case if am successful. That ought to assure you of my earnestness." He smiled gently as he said this. "Knowing full well, as you say, that you would treble them if we happily succeed. I will give you another proof of my earnestness. I loved my mother. Have I won your confidence? Well then, I can grapple with physical disease with fair success; give me the opportunity of grappling with the mental disease which is killing your mother. I have an hour, perhaps two, to spare. Tell me, unreservedly, the story of your mother's life, in which of course yours will be included. Conceal nothing, and be especially explicit in every incident where the feelings are brought into play. If you understand me, and are willing to trust me, commence at once."

I told him all, freely and without reservation, from my first remembrance in connection with my mother, to the time—but a few days past—when I heard her in her delirium speaking to my father about me and my future. Many times during the recital I was compelled to pause from emotion, and when I finished his eyes also were suffused with tears.

“I know now,” he said softly, “what will kill your mother if she dies. It will shock you to hear it, and you must not think me cruel for telling you. When your mother, in the night she was taken ill, cried to you that her heart was almost broken, it was no mere phrase that she uttered—it was a cry from her soul, and the words exactly represented her condition. If she dies, it will be because her heart *is* broken. And you will have broken it. Ay,” he continued gently, as I started in horror from him, “and so would your mother start from me if she had strength and sense to hear and understand. She would think me the cruellest

monster. But what I have said is true nevertheless. Your mother's life has been bound up in yours. No woman, unsustained by most perfect and most unselfish love, could have held up against such trials as hers; where she has had doubts she has thrust them from her, and her deep affection has given her strength to bear her sufferings. For a long time there has been raging within her a mental conflict, the torture of which only those can understand who love as she loves, and only those can feel whose natures are as delicately sensitive as hers. Even I, until now a stranger to her and to you, can see the fire which has been consuming her gentle spirit. And when the final blow came, and she was made to feel by your words that she had wrecked your happiness and had lost your love (for she *must* have felt then what she had long feared), she sank beneath it. I have, thank God, through all my life revered woman's character, but I never revered it so thoroughly as I do now, after hearing

your story. You ask me if all hope is really gone, and if nothing can be done? Well, I see a way. What can kill can cure. I warn you that the chance is a slight one, but it must be tried. Can you afford to go away from London for a time?"

"Yes, I have money saved; and I think I could arrange to take work with me, and do it in the country."

"That is well. If you take your mother away from London, say to the scenes with which you were familiar when you were a child, and attend to her yourself, and make her feel and understand that you love her as she deserves and yearns to be loved, she may recover. That is the only chance. She is almost certain to have conscious intervals. If you have tact enough to be alone with her, as you were in the old days, when her consciousness first returns, it may prove the turning-point towards convalescence. I cannot explain myself more fully; I will give you a simple strengthening medicine with you, and

all necessary directions as to diet. When will you go?"

I arranged to go on the following day, and Josey West said that, notwithstanding what the doctor had said, it was impossible that I should go alone. Her sister Florry, who was nearly sixteen years of age, should accompany us.

"If your mother asks who she is," said Josey, "you can say she is the maid."

So it was settled, and Florry, a pretty, good girl, who was wild with delight at the idea of going into the country, promised to do her best.

No news had been heard of uncle Bryan. I cannot say that, after my anger had cooled, I was not anxious about him. It was impossible for me to be indifferent as to his fate, and I made inquiries quietly, but without result. He had disappeared most effectually, and had left no trace behind. My principal reason for wishing to find him was to let him know that we were leaving his house, and that we should not return; I had

made up my mind on this point. Josey West and I had a long conversation about him.

“I believe he will never come back,” my dear,” said Josey, “never, under any circumstances. Of course you have heard what some of the neighbours say—that he has made away with himself; but that’s all nonsense. He’s not a man of that sort. He’ll rub on grimly and grumly to the end. Why, my dear, if it was to happen that he was to starve to death—which he wouldn’t do willingly, and without trying to get bread—he’d starve quietly and without a murmur! Ah, he’s a wicked old man, I daresay, and I know that you have cause to hate him, but I can’t help liking him a bit for all that. What I shall do about the shop is this, unless you object. I shall shut up our house—there’s no business doing, my dear; I don’t lend out a wardrobe a month—and all the children shall come round here to live. It will be good fun for them. I shall keep the accounts as square as I can, although the

figures are getting into a mess already, and I'm beginning to be bothered with them—but never mind, there's the money, so much paid out, so much coming in; it'll be simple enough to reckon what's left. And if I *do* hear anything of your uncle, I'll be off to him at once, and bring him back, tied up, if he won't come any other way."

I could see no better plan than this, and I thanked Josey cordially.

"Where are you going to first?" she asked, interrupting me abruptly.

"To Hertford, where I was born," I replied.

She nodded, and said she thought it was the best place, and that I must be sure and keep her informed of my whereabouts, as she would want to write to me regularly. The next morning we were off.

We reached Hertford by easy stages. Josey was quite right in insisting that I should take Florry with me. I soon learnt that I could not have done without some one, and I found Florry to be so quietly and unobtrusively useful that I grew very fond of

the little maid. I took lodgings in a pleasant suburb, from the windows of which we could see the river Lea, and the barges gliding indolently along. Florry said it was heavenly. My mother bore the journey well, and was no worse at the end than when we started. I was very thankful for that, for I feared she might not be strong enough to bear it; but we were very careful of her, and if she had been my sister Florry could not have been more attentive and affectionate. But my mother knew no one, and saw only the pictures and figures which her fevered imagination conjured up. I selected for her bed-room a large room on the first floor, and placed her bed so that she could see the river from it. I fixed my table for work so that when she opened her eyes, and looked towards the river, she could see me also. I had been fortunate enough to obtain sufficient work to last me for three or four weeks, and I was sure of more to follow.

On the very first day I observed what I thought was a favourable change in my

mother. Awaking from a restless sleep, she opened her eyes, and saw a white sail passing along the river ; she watched it quietly until it was out of sight, and then closed her eyes and slept again, but more peacefully than before. She did not seem to see me, although I turned my face to her and smiled. It was soon evident that she took pleasure in the prospect of the river, for before two days had passed I observed her lie and watch it restfully. It appeared to act like a charm upon her, bringing peace to her troubled heart in some strange way. In London, during her illness, scarcely an hour had passed, day and night, without her rest being broken by sobs ; but here in Hertford, after she grew accustomed to the sight of the river, her days were quiet and peaceful, and it was only in the night that she was disturbed. During the first week I left her but twice ; once to go to the house in which I was born, and once to visit the old churchyard in which my father was buried. The house was the same as I remembered it, and

the churchyard had a few new gravestones in it; there was no other change. All my childish experiences came vividly to my mind, and I should scarcely have been surprised, as I peeped through the parlour-window, where I used to sit in my low arm-chair with my grandmother, listening to her monotonous heavy breathing, to see her sitting in state, in her silk dress, with her large fat hands folded in her lap. I *did* see a woman who reminded me of Jane Painter, our servant, and I crossed the road quickly and walked away from her. In the churchyard, I went to my father's grave, and then to the grave of Snaggleteeth's little daughter. I found it quite easily, but the inscription upon it was no longer discernible. I remembered so well every incident of that day that I could see myself carried out of the churchyard in Snaggleteeth's arms, and I closed my eyes as I thought how I fell asleep there.

These scenes and remembrances soothed and consoled me; I seemed to be lifted out of a fever of unrest.

Gradually my mother's eyes grew accustomed to see me working always at my table, and they began to dwell on me, at first unconcernedly, but presently with a kind of struggling observance in them. I hailed this change with gladness, and waited and hoped, and prayed humbly night and morning. Josey West wrote to me regularly, and one day this letter came :

“MY DEAR CHRIS,—Don't open the packet enclosed in this until you read my letter. If you do, I'll haunt you, and you shall never have a minute's rest again. You told me once that every person in life has a proper groove. I think it very hard that I should have lived all these years without, until now, falling into *my* proper groove ; I am in it at last, but I am ready to slap all the children's faces to think that so many years have been wasted. I was born to be a grocer, and at last a grocer I am. If you can find me a better one than I am, show him to me, and I'll resign. I've been looking over your

uncle's books, and, as true as I'm a living woman, I'm taking more money than ever he took, if his figures are right. Every day I make a new customer. There's Mrs. Simpson, the bricklayer's wife, at No. 9. If she's been in the shop once, she's been in it a dozen times to-day and yesterday: all the years the old gentleman kept the shop she didn't spend two-and-twopence in it—that's the sum she mentioned, and as I'm a woman of figures now, I must be precise. She does so like a gossip, she says, and she don't mind getting short weight, she says, so long as she can have a friendly word with her quarter of a pound of moist, and her two ounces of the best mixture. She tried all she knew to get the old gentleman to gossip with her, and as he wouldn't, she wouldn't deal with him. Mrs. Simpson is not the only one. There's Mrs. Primmings, and Mrs. Sillitoe, the butcher's wife, and Mrs. Macnamara, who takes snuff. They all like a gossip, and they all come to have it, and so long as they buy their groceries of me, I shall encourage them. Why, you'd

be surprised to see the old shop sometimes ! It's quite an institution.

“ I've got along very well with everything, from the figs to the brickdust ; but one thing puzzled me. If you have any love for me, my sweet child, don't betray me, for I'm not at all sure they couldn't hang me for it ; but it pays, my sweet child, and it doesn't do any one any harm, and I shall go on doing it, and risk the consequences. Well, it's this. On the first Saturday I was here, the people came in for uncle Bryan's pills and uncle Bryan's mixture. There was a supply in the drawers, and I served the customers. If there was one of them, my dear, there was fifty, and every one spent his penny or twopence, and a few threepence. Well, during the early part of the week I ran short of the pills and the mixture, and I was puzzled about another supply. I knew that the old gentleman made his own medicine, and I looked about for the prescription, but couldn't find it. Now, for all I knew, the success of the business might depend upon these pills and

mixtures, which some of the neighbours are ready to swear by as being able to cure asthma, and consumption, and indigestion, and bronchitis, and dysentery, and flushings, and palpitation, and wooden legs, and sprains, and bruises, and pains in the bowels, and headache, and too much brandy, and low fever, and high fever, and jaundice, and warts, and scrofula, and coughs, and colds, and the chills, and I don't know what all besides. And if you knew the trouble I've taken to put all these things together, you'd cry out, 'Bless the little woman! What a painstaking creature she is!' But to come back. For all I knew, as I said, if the customers couldn't get these wonderful pills at our shop, they might go elsewhere to buy their tea and sugar, and that would never do. I was in a pucker, and Turk came in last Tuesday night, and I told him my trouble. Says Turk, 'How many pills and how many bottles of mixture have you got left?' I counted them. Fourteen bottles of mixture, and eleven boxes of pills, large and small.

‘And what do they cure?’ says Turk. I went over all those things that I’ve written at the top of this sheet. ‘I don’t feel as if anything particular is the matter with me,’ says Turk; ‘how do you feel, Josey?’ I told him that I felt the same. ‘Then,’ says Turk, ‘it’s quite necessary that you and I should take a bottle of that mixture, and six pills, without one moment’s delay. Else it might prove fatal.’ And would you believe it, my dear? Before I knew where I was, Turk had poured one of the bottles of the mixture down my throat, and another down his own, and made me, willy nilly, swallow pill for pill with him until we had each swallowed half a dozen. ‘And now,’ said Turk, ‘if we die, we’ll perish in one another’s arms; and I’ll come to-morrow night and write our epitaphs. We’ll be buried in one grave, and all the neighbours will come to the funeral.’ I didn’t like it, I tell you, and I kept awake all night, fancying I had pains; but I ate a very good breakfast the next morning, and everything inside of me

went on as usual. Turk came in the evening, and we compared notes, as he said. He said then that it was a very bad case indeed, and we must take another bottle of mixture and six more pills each of us. I said I wouldn't; he said I should, and that he wouldn't die without me; and as I'm a living woman, he held my head and poured the mixture down my throat. After that, I thought I might as well take the pills, especially as Turk said I'd have to. One may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, you know. They didn't have the slightest effect upon us for better or worse (and the sooner that day comes for me, and the man with the ring, the better I shall like it, my sweet child, and that's plain speaking), and Turk said it was the most wonderful cure that ever was known of the most wonderful complication of diseases that ever was heard of. Now if you can guess what Turk did next, you're a clever boy; but as you never *would* guess, I'll tell you. He set to work making bread pills by the thousand (we found the

board your uncle used to make them with), and he made a great basin of mixture, that tasted for all the world like the mixture in your uncle's bottles. You know, there scarcely is any taste at all in it. He coloured the water, and then we filled all the empty bottles and pill-boxes, and had stock enough to last a month. You would have laughed if you had seen us making the medicine. It was done after the shop was shut and all the children were in bed. We locked the doors, and put something over all the windows and keyholes, and every minute or two Turk wriggled to the door, to slow music, to listen if anybody was outside. We were like conspirators. We had a great run on the pills and mixture on Saturday night, and my heart felt as if it was sinking into my shoes every time I served a box or a bottle; but I was obliged to put a brave face on it, and I served them over the counter as if they were the 'real grit,' as the Yankees say. When I went to bed, I wondered how many murders I had

committed, and how many times I could be hanged. I felt worse on Monday morning when I stood behind the counter; but as the day went on, and I didn't hear of any persons in the neighbourhood dying in convulsions, and as I didn't see any undertaker's men about, I began to get a bit relieved in my mind. And when Mrs. Huxley came in—Mr. Huxley is besieged by a regular army of diseases, asthma, and rackets, and 'ketches in the side,' as his wife calls them—well, when she came in, and told me how ill her poor dear man was on Saturday night before taking the pills and mixture, and how well he was on Sunday after he'd swallowed two big doses, I began to think better of them. I plucked up courage to ask one and another how everybody was who had taken the physic; and would you believe it, my sweet child, none of them were ever better in their lives. And a story has got about that your uncle Bryan has gone to some place to make the pills and mixture in secret, so that no one shall find out what is in them. *I* say nothing except 'Oh,' and

‘Ah,’ and ‘Indeed,’ very mysteriously, and as if *I* didn’t know anything about it (as how should I?), and the effect of these ‘Ohs,’ and ‘Ahs,’ and ‘Indeeds’ is so extraordinary, that if I stood in a waggon, and talked by the hour together, with music playing all about me, and all the young ones dancing and posing, the thing couldn’t work better. People are beginning to do what they never did before—they are buying the medicine in the middle of the week; and two strangers have already come in from a long distance for two boxes of the wonderful pills, one to cure palpitation and the other for the jaundice.

“Turk is getting along famously. He is a real good fellow, and everybody likes him. He is making heaps of new friends, and is doing a fine business. He sends his love to you, and says he will have plenty to tell you when you come home.

“Gus is going to India and Australia with a company; he plays leading business, and has a three years’ engagement at twelve pounds a week, and all his travelling expenses

paid. Not so bad for Gus; but then he's a genius, my dear.

"I hope Florry is behaving herself; but I am only joking when I say that. Don't you let her fall in love with you, and then break her heart; I'm joking again. When you come to think of us altogether, master Christopher, don't you think we're a remarkable family? If you don't, I do. You'd find it hard to beat us. You should read the letters Florry writes to us; they are perfect gems. Where we all got our cleverness from is a perfect puzzle; but it runs in some families. I'm glad Florry is with your mother; it will do her good. Ah, my dear, do you know I pray every night that you may bring your dear good mother home to us strong and well? I do, my dear, and it does me good.

"The letters that are in the enclosed packet came to the shop this morning. One of them is very heavy. I know your uncle's writing from the account-books he left behind him, and I see that it is his writing

on the envelope. If there's any address inside, let me know, and I'll go and drag him home, although it will be the ruin of a fine business I see looming in the future in bread pills and the famous mixture made of coloured water.

"And now, my dear, I must leave off. This is the longest letter I ever wrote in my life, and if anybody had told me that I could have written it, I shouldn't have believed him. All the children send their love and kisses, and I send mine, and six kisses for your mother. When you give them to her, whisper that they're from a queer little woman in Paradise Row, who loves both of you very much. Now don't you run away with the idea that *I'm* going to break my heart over you.

"Oh, I almost forgot to say that the doctor was here to-day. He hasn't time to write, but he says he has read your letter carefully, and he thinks that your mother is going along well. He expects a change very soon for the better. He gave me

another prescription for you, which I send in this.

“I never thought much of it till lately, my dear, but really there are a great many good people in the world——But there! if I don’t stop at once, I shall go rambling on all night, and there’s some one tapping at the door. Come in! Only think, I’ve written it instead of saying it.—Your affectionate friend,

“JOSEY.”

I untied the packet which Josey had enclosed, and found two letters in it—one, very bulky, in uncle Bryan’s handwriting, the other written by Jessie. How my heart beat as I gazed at the latter! Both were addressed to my mother.

It was a fine clear night, and a sweet soft air was stirring—so sweet and soft that I was sitting at my work-table with the window open. Florry had gone to bed; my mother was asleep. I had always opened my mother’s letters, and I reflected whether I was justified in opening these. After a little while I

decided to read uncle Bryan's letter, for the reason that it would probably inform me where he was staying; in which case I should be able to rid myself of the responsibility of his business. Jessie's letter I would not read—at least for the present; she may have written in it what she might not wish me to see. I laid it aside, and unfastened the envelope of uncle Bryan's letter. It contained many sheets of manuscript, methodically arranged, some in uncle Bryan's handwriting, some in a writing which was strange to me. I give them in their order. The first was from uncle Bryan to my mother:

“DEAR EMMA,—I will not speak of my reasons for leaving you. Perhaps you may be able to guess them. I did it for the best. My absence may bring peace and happiness into your home, for it is yours. I relinquish all claim to it. When I tell you that I shall never return, you will know that I shall not set foot inside the shop again. I cannot have many years longer to live, and I shall

do well enough, so do not give yourself any anxiety about me. I shall always be able to get my bread, and I shall wait patiently for death, and shall be grateful when it comes, but I shall do nothing to hasten it. Life has been a weary load to me, and I shall be glad to shake it off. This impatience would change to resignation and to gratitude, not not for death, but for life, if it were possible for one thing to happen; but it is utterly, utterly impossible, and it is just and right that it should be out of my reach.

“I have a distinct purpose in writing to you, apart from any selfish words which fall from my pen. It is this: In telling you and my nephew the story of my life I threw blame upon my dead wife. I did worse than this—I slandered her memory. That I spoke what I believed is no excuse for me. I created for myself, out of my blindness and fatal imperiousness of self, a delusion and a lie which have embittered my life. I could bear this with calmness if the consequences had fallen only on my-

self ; but I see now, when it is too late, how I have made others suffer. The bitterest punishment that could fall upon me would not serve to expiate my deadly sin. I do suffer bitterly, keenly, and my soul writhes from pain and shame.

“Can I speak more strongly? And yet these words are weak. Too late I see my folly and my crime. Many things that Christopher said to me were true. I humbly ask his forgiveness, and I humbly pray that the happiness he said I did my best to destroy may yet fall to his lot. If he will picture me an old man with a bleeding heart, into whose life few rays of sunshine have passed, pleading to him, he may soften towards me. Perhaps he may believe that I loved him ; if he does believe it, he will believe the truth.

“The letter I send with this is from my dead wife ; it will explain itself. I received it at the same time the letter came to you from Jessie. Merely looking at her name upon paper, now that I have written it,

deepens my anguish, my shame, and my remorse. It will never fall to my lot to ask her forgiveness, as I ask yours and your son's. I put myself in her place, and I know what her feelings are.

"Let Christopher read this and my wife's letter.

"Good-bye, Emma. For your unwavering kindness and gentleness to me, who have repaid you so badly, receive the humble heartfelt thanks of

"BRYAN CAREY."

Then followed the letter from his wife.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM FRANCES TO HER HUSBAND, BRYAN CAREY.

“I ADDRESS you from the grave, and I pray that what I write may never reach your hands. If, unhappily, you are fated to read these words, they will bring their own punishment with them.

“Do I hope, then, that you may be dead on the day that this letter shall be opened or destroyed, unread? No. But rather than you should receive it, it would be better that the earth covered you, as it has covered me these many years. You will understand my meaning before you have finished reading. I write in no vindictive spirit. All bitter feeling has left me ; although even yourself may acknowledge that I have good cause for feeling

bitterly towards you. But I am resolved that you shall not blight another life as you blighted mine. Another life so dear to me! that should be so dear to you! Another life that has been some comfort to me in the midst of my sorrow and affliction; and that I hope may be long spared for happiness.

“It is not a giddy girl who is writing to you. It is a woman who has learned to look upon things with fair judgment, notwithstanding that she has suffered deeply from a cruel wrong inflicted upon her.

“When you first came to me I was a child almost in years. I had had no opportunity of knowing the world, or of gaining that experience which is necessary to those who move in its busy quarters. I had never known trouble or sorrow, and, until my father fell into misfortune, I had lived very happily with him. He had his faults, I do not doubt, as we all have; but he was a good father to the last, and I loved him to the last. You judged him harshly, I know, and made no excuses for him—but it is in your nature to

judge harshly. Weak as he was to some extent, I do not believe that he would have wronged his wife—doubly wronged her—and then have deserted her: as you wronged and deserted me. I have some remembrance of my mother, who died when I was very young, and I know that he was indulgent and good to her.

“I fancy I can see a hard look on your face at the word indulgent. But some natures require indulgence, and are the better and the happier for it. You were for a time indulgent to me, and it was for this, as well as for other qualities in you upon which I placed higher value than you deserved, that I loved you.

“Yes, I loved you. I scarcely know whether you ever believed I did; for, thinking over matters since our separation, I have arrived—whether rightly or wrongly—at what I believe to be a correct estimate of your character, at what assuredly *is* a correct estimate if you are destined to read it. I see you, hard and intolerant; doubtful of

goodness in others ; prone to place the most uncharitable construction on the actions of others. Lightness of heart is in your eyes a sign of levity. Surely the moods which were familiar to me in the first days of our acquaintanceship, and in the first few months of our wedded life, must have been foreign to your nature.

“I see something more in you. I see you false to your wife and to your marriage vows. I see you, who prided yourself upon your sense of justice, most unjust and ungenerous to me. Let your heart answer if I am wrong.

“Recall the evening on which we met for the first time, and certain words which passed between us. You were at my father’s house, advising him upon his business affairs, which had become complicated. You said that my voice reminded you of a friend—a lady friend, very dear to you—and that she was dead. The words did not make much impression upon me at the time ; but I had occasion afterwards to remember them.

I liked you that evening. Your grave face, your sensible ways, were agreeable to me, frivolous girl as you supposed me to be. We kept but little society ; the only regular visitor at my father's house was my cousin Ralph. I loved him ; but not in the way you suspected. We had been intimate from early childhood, and I had a sincere affection for him. When I became better acquainted with you, I saw faults in him which I had not hitherto discerned ; there was a want of stability in his character ; he was indolent and deficient in manliness. Even if you had not entered into my life, and marred it, I think I should never have had any but a cousinly love for him. So far as I was concerned, there were no grounds for jealousy on your part, and no grounds for your base suspicions of me. I do not speak for him ; I speak for myself. And when you wrote to me on the day you deserted me, and accused me of loving him as a woman should love the man she wishes to marry, you lied. But you had

another purpose to serve, and it suited you to write the lie.

“Of our married life I need say but few words. I was very happy for a time. You had behaved nobly and generously to my father; you were most kind and indulgent to me. If, as I afterwards learnt, we were living beyond our means, I had no suspicion of it. You never gave me the slightest hint to that effect, and you encouraged what I now know were extravagances in me. But—believe it or not as you will—I could have been contented and happy without them. You told me you were rich, and you could not fail to know that I had no idea of the value of money. Why could you not have confided in me? Was it honest to keep me, of your own free will, in such absolute ignorance, and then to blame me for not having known? I think, if you had trusted me, that you might have found some good in me — judged even by the light of your own hard judgment; but it is in your nature to accuse and judge

in the same breath, and to do both unmercifully.

“I remember well the last day you were kind to me. You left me in the morning with smiles; you returned home long after midnight a changed man. I, also, was changed when you returned. I have other cause to remember the day; for in the evening my cousin Ralph came to see me, and stayed with me until nearly eleven o’clock. You had sent me a note saying that you were detained at your office by important business. I read the note to my cousin, and he laughed at it, and said that you had good cause for your absence. His words conveyed a strange meaning to my ears, and I asked for an explanation. He gave it to me; and I learnt, to my horror, that you were in the habit of visiting another woman—a stranger in the town. Before I had recovered from the shock, I received another. My cousin Ralph, in a mad moment, proved himself to be what I had not hitherto suspected—a vile bad man. He told me, in passionate terms, that he loved me, and that

he had loved me from boyhood ; that it had been the dream of his life that we should be married, and that, but for you and your money, his life might have been a life of happiness. I listened in dismay and astonishment ; I knew that he had an affection for me, but I thought it was such an affection as one cousin might innocently have entertained for another. I was so overwhelmed by this discovery, and by his accusations against you, that I had no power to stay his words. He misinterpreted my silence, and proceeded in wilder terms to propose flight to me. I tried to answer him, but my grief, and my terror lest you should return while he was in the house—for he was at my feet and refused to stir—made me weak. I implored him for my sake and for his own to leave me ; and presently, when I grew stronger, I addressed him in words which it was impossible for him to misunderstand. It flashed upon me then that he had invented the story he had told me about you, and I taunted him with it. He answered me to

the effect that he would prove it true before many days were over, and that then I might possibly listen to him more favourably. He left me ; and your own conduct towards me from that day, during the short time we were together, was almost a sufficient proof. You would have judged upon that evidence ; I was not content with it. I soon tasted the bitterness that lay in knowledge. A clerk in your office, who had for a purpose of his own made himself acquainted with the history of this woman—probably to use against you in some way—and whom you had employed to convey money and letters to her at different times, told me more than I wanted to know. On the day that you had the public quarrel with my cousin Ralph—I heard of it soon afterwards, for it became matter of common talk—I discovered that this woman came from a town in which you had formerly resided—that you knew her then—and that her history was a shameful one. Then there came to me the words that had passed between us upon your first visit to my

father's house, when you said that my voice reminded you of a woman who was dear to you, and who was dead. It was easy to supply the blank spaces in the story to make it complete—shamefully, miserably complete. Your clerk told me that the life you had lived in that town was not a respectable one: I did not ask him how he had gained his knowledge, but I was sure of its truth. You left that town, and came to this place, a complete stranger, knowing no one, known by none. You refused to speak of your past life; not a word had ever passed your lips with reference to it. What other confirmation was needed of the truth of your clerk's statements? You tried to blot out your past career, knowing that it would not bear the light, and that the good name and position you had gained would be sullied and lost if the particulars were made public. You deserted the woman who had been your companion, and when you were inadvertently betrayed into remembrance of her by the sound of my voice, you told me she was

dead. You never mentioned her again, nor did I, for I had forgotten her. But see how hard it is to lead a life of hypocrisy, as you have done ! Shame never dies, nor can it ever be completely wiped away. After years of sojourn here, when you had gained money, position, and a good name ; when you had taken a simple, ignorant, and innocently-vain girl to your heart, and had sworn to cherish and protect her—this woman tracks you, finds you, and appeals to you by the remembrance of old times, and perhaps by other arguments more powerful, of which I am ignorant. On the very evening she meets you, you take her to a house in the town, and provide lodgings for her, and from that time your visits are frequent. Is this part of your story complete, and need I add to it by saying that you mentioned not a word concerning the woman to the wife you professed to love ? If there was no shame in the relations that existed between you and her, why should you have taken such pains to conceal them ? On the day you deserted me, you

told me you were ruined, and you adopted the miserable subterfuge of saying that you had discovered all, and that you could no longer live with me. Your meaning was plain enough. You implied that I was false to you and to the vows I had taken on the day we were married. A more wicked lie never poisoned the heart of man or woman. I had brought shame and disgrace upon you, you said, and that it was useless my sending after you. I have read this letter often—it is destroyed now; I burnt it lest one who is dearer to me than my heart's blood should see it—and I have wondered at my folly and credulity in ever, for one moment, believing you to be a good and just man. For I did believe you to be this. There was a time in my life when I set you up as a model of honour and integrity and truth. The last words of your letter are burnt into my heart. Do you remember them? 'If I could make you a free woman, so that you might marry the man you love, I would willingly lay down my life; but it cannot

be done. The only and best reparation I can offer is to promise, as I do now most faithfully, to wipe you out of my heart, so that you may be free from me for ever.' How fair those words sound—how self-sacrificing—how manly! What a noble nature do they display! Would it be believed that while this letter was on its way to the wife whom he was about to desert—to the wife whom he had most cruelly wronged and most shamefully betrayed—the man who wrote it was entering the house where the woman lived who had been his companion in former years? The next morning you left. Two days afterwards the woman followed you to London.

“Is anything more wanted to complete the shameful story? Had I brought disgrace upon you, or had you brought it upon me? A noble reparation, indeed, did you make to me!

“You may ask how it was that I discovered your visit to the woman. My father and my cousin saw you coming from the house, where doubtless you had completed all your

arrangements, and left your final instructions. My cousin it was who told me. ‘Now,’ he said, ‘do you believe that he is false?’ ‘Yes,’ I answered; ‘I am convinced of it.’ What followed? Remember it is your dead wife who is speaking to you, and do not dare, for your soul’s sake, to add to your cruelty by doubting what she says. My cousin Ralph then began to speak again of his own selfish passion, and I bade him never to presume to address me again. From that day I never saw him; some little while afterwards my father told me he had gone abroad, but we never heard from him.

“We remained—my father and I—for a few weeks after your departure, and then my father’s health suddenly broke down. In one thing you had most completely succeeded; you had blackened my name as well as your own. Innocent as I was, wronged as I was, I think no one in my native place pitied me. Persons who had once respected me avoided me, or slighted me. Day by day the torture of living in this atmosphere

of injustice grew until it was unbearable ; and when my father broke down, I took him with me into a strange place, where neither of us was known, and where I hoped by carefully husbanding our small means, and by employing some hours of the day in needlework, to be enabled to live quietly, if not in peace. There was another reason why I was anxious to leave—a reason which you will now learn for a certainty for the first time. I was about to become a mother.

“I kept this secret from you. Often and often had I listened to the expression of your wishes—the dearest wish of your heart, you said—that our union might be blessed with children. Your wish was that our first child might be a girl, and I used to hang with delight upon your words—believing in them in my credulous faith—when you described how you would educate and rear her into a good woman. I kept the secret, intending to joyfully surprise you later on ; but it was fated that you should never learn it from my lips. When my time drew near, I was among

strangers. I prayed that I might be blessed with a boy, who would be able to fight against the world's cruelties—with a boy who might one day—if you lived—be able to tell you to your face that you had slandered his mother. I had those thoughts at that time, and I set them down so that you may know exactly the state of my mind towards you. I prayed most fervently that the child might not be a girl, whose fate it might be to be treated by a man as her unhappy mother was treated by you. But my prayers were not heard. The child I clasped to my breast—your child—was a girl.

“I hardly dared to look into her face at first, for I feared that she might resemble you, and that I should be compelled to hate her. I thanked God when I saw that there was but little resemblance to you. Think when you read this what my feelings towards you must have been.

“My darling's was the sweetest, most beautiful face that I had ever gazed upon. I had never conceived it possible that a human

heart could throb with such ineffable delight as mine did even in the midst of my bitter sorrow and shame, when I looked into my darling's face and eyes. I offered up grateful prayers that I lived and was a mother, and I offered up prayers of thankfulness also that it was out of your power to rob me of my treasure. That you would have done it had you known, I entertained no doubt.

“The first few months of my child's life I was as happy as [it was possible for a wronged and betrayed woman to be. Intending in these lines to hide nothing, I will not disguise from you that I shed many bitter tears because she was deprived of a father's love; but she did not lack love and attention. She was my one comfort and joy; I soon had no one else to love but her.

“My father died. The doctor who had attended him in his illness warned me that, unless I was careful of myself, my life might be short. The thought that my darling might be left, helpless and dependent among strangers, frightened me, and I did not know

which way to turn for counsel and advice. I had not a friend in the world capable of helping me by a kindly, sensible word. To this condition you had brought me.

“But my cup of sorrow was not yet full. The doctor I have mentioned was an unmarried man. He believed me to be a widow, as I had given out. I had no other resource than to speak this untruth. It was impossible for me to say that I was a helpless, unhappy woman, who had been deserted by her husband. To such a creature strangers show no mercy; they put their own construction on the story and judge accordingly—as you would judge, harshly, unfeelingly. I think I should not have cared so much for myself, but I had my darling to look to.

“The doctor flattered me by saying that he saw I was a lady, and, in most respectful terms, he invited my confidence. He was most delicate and considerate, but I could not confide in him or any one; my cruel story and my cruel wrongs must be for ever locked in my breast. He did not press me

when he saw that I was pained by his inquiries, but he paid me great attention, and by his kindness lightened my load. I did not place any serious construction upon his intentions, nor indeed did I think of them, for I was entirely wrapt up in my love for my darling child, who was growing every day more beautiful and more engaging. But when he asked me to be his wife, my eyes were opened. If I had been a free woman I would have accepted him, if only for the sake of providing a comfortable home for my child. As I was in chains, I refused him. He said he was a patient man, that he loved me very sincerely, and that he would wait. In the heavy catalogue of my sins that you have against me, place this new one—that this good man loved me. He continued his attentions, and they brought me into fresh disgrace. In the place I was living there were single ladies, and mothers who had daughters to marry, who entertained a hope that the doctor would choose from among them, and they were angry

when they saw that I stood in their way. I do not know whom I have to thank for what followed, but gradually rumours got about to my discredit. I was not a widow; I was not a married woman; the name I went by was not my own. Women shrugged their shoulders when they met me; men stared at me insolently and familiarly. What had occurred in my native town when you deserted me was repeated here. I had no alternative but to fly from the place.

“At that time my darling was nearly three years old, and the unkind creatures had attempted to drop poison even into her young and innocent mind. One day she asked me, in her pretty way, where her father was. ‘You have none, my darling,’ I said; ‘he is dead.’

“In the new place I found refuge in I made friends with a kind family, who grew very fond of my child—as none indeed could help doing. Her bright ways, her innocence, her artlessness, would win any heart not dead to human affection. If anything should

happen to me, these friends will take care of my darling as long as they are able. I think it is likely that I shall not live long, and I have thought anxiously over the future of my darling until she arrives at an age when she may be able to protect and provide for herself. I have consulted with my new friends, and I have arranged everything to the best of my ability and judgment. I shall place in their hands a small box, which, in the event of my death and of their being unable to maintain my child (for they are poor people), is to be given to her with plain instructions. These instructions it will be necessary for me here to explain, first saying, however, that should these good friends be able to look after my child until she arrives at womanhood, there will be no necessity to give them to her. In that event, also, the box and its contents will be burnt. They have promised me faithfully, and I know they will keep their word.

“If I am gone, and they are too poor to help my child, she will be, as I have been,

without a friend. These good people have some idea of emigrating, if they can save sufficient money, and then my darling will be indeed helpless. They might take her with them, it may be said; but they may not have sufficient means. And then, again, it inflicts the most bitter pain upon me to think that my darling child should be taken thousands of miles from the spot where her mother's ashes are laid. She will be helpless, as I have said; but there is one upon whom she has a just claim—yourself. I wished her never to see you; I wished that you might never look upon her beautiful face, nor feel the charm of her presence. But I see no other way to secure a home for her. Should she be left without friends, she will come to you, a stranger, with a letter from me, who will even then be dead, asking you to give a home to a friendless child. She will bear a strange name, and will know you only as a stranger. Neither will you know her; it may be that you will see in her face some slight resemblance to the wife

whose happiness you have destroyed, and it may be that you may place that resemblance to your dead wife's discredit. Do so, and bring another shame upon your soul.

"How do I know where you live in London? It has been discovered for me, by means of a clue which my father obtained soon after your flight. When a mother is working for her child, she can do much. I have never seen London, but I know your address; and on the day that the friends I have made for my child find they can no longer provide for her, she will present herself at your door. Hard and unfeeling, cruel and unjust, as you are, I think you will not turn her from it.

"In the small box which my friends will give to my darling child are three letters, numbered first, second, third. On the first letter is written, 'To be opened first, on your eighteenth birthday, before the other letters are touched. This is the sacred wish of your dead mother.' I copy this letter in this

place, so that you may clearly understand what I have done :

“ ‘ MY DARLING CHILD, — I wish you to regard these written words as though they are spoken to you with my dying breath, and to obey them. If Mr. Bryan Carey has made your life happy, and if you are in the enjoyment of a happy home, destroy the second letter by fire, and hand him the third. If it is otherwise with you, and your life with him has been in any way unhappy, destroy the third letter by fire, as you would have done the second. Then seek some quiet place and read the second letter, and when you have read it, send it to Mr. Carey, and act as you think best for your welfare and happiness. That God will for ever bless and protect my darling is the prayer of your mother,

‘ FRANCES.’

“The third letter contains a short account of my life since you left me, and the state-

ment that Jessie is your daughter. It leaves it to your judgment to make the relationship known to her, or to let it remain a secret.

“The second letter you are now reading.

“If it fall into your hands, Jessie will have read it first, and will know how basely you behaved to me. She will know that your conduct towards me was such that a woman never can forgive, and she will understand that a man had better kill his wife than inflict upon her such shame and misery and humiliation as you inflicted upon me, a guiltless woman, as God is my Judge. She will know that you deserted me for another woman, and left me, a simple inexperienced girl, to battle alone with the pitiless world. Ah, how pitiless it is, how uncharitable, how cruel! How many nights have I passed shedding what might have been tears of blood, for they were wrung from a bruised and bleeding heart! She, who has lived with me many happy years in her childhood’s life, will, when she reads this, be able to look back with the eyes of a woman upon the

life I led while we were together, and she will know whether it was without stain and without reproach. She will have had experience both of you and myself, and of both our natures and minds, and she will have sense and intelligence enough to judge fairly between us. I repeat here, with all the strength of my soul, what I have declared before—that when you accused me of loving my cousin Ralph and of being false to you, you lied most foully.

“I believe that I decided rightly when I decided to write these things. As you have acted towards your daughter, so shall be your reward. Whether it be for good or ill, you have earned it.

“Your unhappy wife,

“FRANCES.”

After the last sheet of this letter, there were a few words in uncle Bryan's handwriting, evidently intended for my mother: “If you see her whom I scarcely dare call my daughter for the shame which overwhelms me, tell her

but one thing from me—that her mother's suspicions concerning the woman I befriended are unfounded. She will believe this, perhaps ; it is the truth."

CHAPTER IX.

A HAPPY RECOVERY.

THE perusal of this letter affected me powerfully. There was something solemn in the mere handling of a confession written by a woman long since dead—a woman who had been so cruelly wronged and had so cruelly suffered. It was like a voice from the tomb, and it was impossible to resist the conviction that forced itself upon my mind, that it was the solemn bitter truth.

I had never suspected that Jessie was in any way related to uncle Bryan, but it did not surprise me to learn it. The fact that she was my cousin brought with it no sense of pleasure; it gave me no claim on her affection. Rather would she be inclined

to look with feelings of repugnance upon all who were connected with her by blood, for by the nearest of these her mother had been brought to misery and shame, and her own life had been made most unhappy; and it was not to be doubted that all her soul would rise in vindication of her mother's honour.

It was past midnight, and everything about me was very still. My mother was sleeping more peacefully than she had yet done through her illness, and I remarked with thankfulness that the distressed expression on her face was wearing away, and that she was beginning to look something like her old sweet self. Insensibly in her sleep her arm stole round my neck. I let it rest there for many minutes, and when I rose from her side and kissed her fingers, there was a soft smile upon her lips—the first unclouded smile I had seen there for many a day. It gave me hope and gladdened my heart.

I was in no humour for sleep, having had

some rest during the day, and I had told Florry that I would sit up with my mother until the morning. I placed the letter I had been reading in my desk, and then, arranging the screen in such a manner that the light by which I worked should not fall upon my mother's face, and also in such a manner that when she opened her eyes they must rest upon me, I sat at my table and worked and thought. My work was noiseless, and I could do it without disturbing the stillness. I was thankful for that. I do not know in what way it came into my mind that there are numberless small things in life which we ought to be grateful for, but the thought came. Presently, while my hands and eyes were busy on delicate manipulations in the wood, my mind reverted to uncle Bryan and Jessie, and the strange, strange letter I had read. Could Jessie ever forgive her father? Never, I thought. The unkindnesses inflicted upon herself she might have been eager to forgive when she made the discovery that she had a father living, but the wrong inflicted upon

her mother was past forgiveness. Truly, the dead wife had punished the living husband with a cunning hand. But it was a just blow that she had struck. She had shown no vindictiveness ; for had he behaved kindly to the girl to whom he had given the shelter of his home, Jessie would never have been made acquainted with her mother's wrongs. Yes, it was just, but it was terrible.

Terrible indeed. To find a father only to hate him. To find a father, and in the discovery to gain the knowledge that his conduct to her mother might have brought lasting shame and disgrace upon her own good name.

And he ? How did he feel it ? The words he addressed to me in his letter to my mother were very clear in my mind. "Too late I see my folly and my crime. Many things that Christopher said to me were true. I humbly ask his forgiveness, and I humbly pray that the happiness he said I did my best to destroy may yet fall to his lot. If he will picture me, an old man with a bleeding heart, into whose life but few rays

of sunshine have passed, pleading to him, he may soften towards me. Perhaps he may believe that I loved him; if he does believe it, he will believe the truth."

I did believe it; I felt that it was true. I asked myself whether all the fault was his; whether he was entirely to blame because it was not in his nature to show love in its sweetest way. I recalled the words he had used when he described to me and my mother the home in which he spent his childhood's days. I raised up a picture of his mother, a weak-minded woman, ruled as with a rod of iron by her husband, ruled even in her affections by a man whom his own son could not respect, knowing him to be a hypocrite. The son must have learned bad lessons in such a home. Was it not to the son's credit that he refused to be moulded by such influences? But if the son had had such a mother as mine——

Ah, if an influence so sweet had sweetened his life—if an affection so pure had purified his mind—how different it might have been

with him ! The cobwebs of scepticism and bitter distrust might have been swept from his soul. He might have grown into a good and noble man. For I recognised qualities in uncle Bryan's nature far higher than those with which the men I was acquainted with were gifted. My blind unreasoning anger against him was gone, and I felt only pity for the desolate old man. I pictured him, as he had desired me to do, an old man with a bleeding heart, into whose life but few rays of sunshine had passed—an old man who in his youth had been soured, misdirected, misjudged, his rare qualities and gifts turned against himself ; and I pitied him with a full heart, and most freely forgave him.

At this point I recalled everything in his character that spoke in his favour—his love of flowers, his love of justice, which had something heroic in it, his contempt for meanness and roguery, his gentle behaviour towards my mother, by whom alone he was properly understood. He would have been astonished had he known my thoughts.

In this better mood I continued my work. Tick, tick, tick, went the little clock on the mantelpiece, and the sound seemed to add to the stillness instead of disturbing it. Once, upon raising my eyes to my mother's bed, I fancied that she was awake and was observing me. I stole towards the bed, but her eyes were closed; I kissed her softly, and resumed my work. The wood-block I was engaged upon represented a woman standing by a field after the corn had been cut and gathered. It was sunset, and the woman, who was between forty and fifty years of age, was gazing sadly and mournfully at the setting sun and the bare field, with only the stubble left on it. I knew the story which the picture was intended to illustrate. The woman had been parted from her son, who was in a distant land, many thousands of miles across the sea, and the last news she had received from him represented him as being beset by misfortune and sickness. She was standing now, thinking mournfully of the times when she and he were together;

and the sun, setting among sad clouds, and the corn-field, shorn of its golden glory, were in fit keeping with her thoughts. Another picture drawn on the wood, and which I had not yet commenced to engrave, lay before me. The scene was the same, and the figure of the woman was there, but the time and circumstances were different from the last. It was morning in the opening of summer; the corn was ripening, and lying on the ground at the mother's feet was the son, restored to her in health. Insensibly, as I proceeded with my work, my thoughts reverted to a certain time in my childhood when my mother toiled during the day and sat up late in the night working for me. How many a night had I seen her sitting at the table in our poorly-furnished one room, stitching until daylight dawned to earn bread for her child. The songs she used to sing softly to herself came to my lips, and I murmured them almost unconsciously, while the tears ran from my eyes. My heart was throbbing with exquisite tenderness towards

my mother, and I thought that never in all my reading had I met with a woman so thoroughly good and pure and true. I covered my eyes with my hand to shut out the aching fear that, with the force of a visible presence, was creeping upon me and whispering that the priceless blessing of her love was lost to me for ever; but the action brought a deeper darkness to my soul. It lasted but a moment, thank God! for suddenly my name was uttered in a soft clear tone.

“Chris!”

My heart almost ceased to beat as the sound of my mother’s voice, with its old sweet cadence, fell upon my ear; but I remembered the caution which the doctor had given me, and I quietly proceeded with my work.

“Yes, mother.”

“What are you doing, dear child?”

“Working, mother.”

I scarcely dared to raise my eyes, and I waited anxiously for her to speak again.

"It is late, my child."

"Not very, mother. The night was so beautiful, and I had such a long rest this morning, that I thought I would work for an hour or two upon some pictures I have to get done quickly." I spoke calmly and softly and cheerfully. "I thought you were asleep, mother."

"I have lain for some time watching you, my darling, and wondering whether this was not all a dream."

"A dream, mother!" I said, and I went to her side, and passed my arm under her neck. "No, it is not a dream." She gazed at me long and earnestly.

"Where are we, dear child?"

"In the country, at Hertford. You were not very well, and I brought you down here to nurse you into health again."

She pondered over these words. "You were singing my songs, my dearest."

"I hope they did not disturb you, mother."

"What sweeter music could I hear,

dear child? But what made you sing them?"

"I was thinking of the old times, mother, when you and I were together, and when you used to work late in the night for me. There was a prayer in my heart while I was singing."

"What prayer, my dearest?"

"That I might be able to repay you by my love for the love you have given me all my life. That God would be merciful to me, and would give me the power to show you that I love you with all my heart and soul, and to prove that as no son ever had a more loving mother than you have been to me, so no mother ever had a son who was filled with a deeper love than I have for you."

"Dear child! darling child!" she said, with deep-drawn sighs of happiness, "what can I say to you for your goodness to me? I do not deserve it! I do not deserve it!" She folded me in her arms, and I lay by her side with my face pressed close to hers.

"If you say that, mother, I shall think you do not believe me."

"No, no, dear child, I do believe you. These are tears of joy that I am shedding. And we two are alone, darling!"

"Yes, mother, and I only want one thing to make me quite happy."

"Tell it me, child?" she asked, a little anxiously.

"To see you well again, mother, that is all. Then I shall go on with my work, and we shall get along famously together. But you mustn't talk any longer; you must go to sleep. Shall I sing you to sleep as you used to do to me? Do you remember that dear old song? Well, but *I* must not talk any longer. I am going to lie here; first let me put out the light." When I returned to the fond prison of her loving arms, I said softly, "I shall only say two or three words more. First, mother, you must promise me to get quite well. Promise, now, for my sake."

"I will try to, dear child; I think I shall; I feel strong already!"

“Then you must tell me that you are happy, dear mother.”

“Ah, my darling, there is not a happier mother in the world. Blessed with such a son, I should be ungrateful to God if I were not.”

“And now, mother, not another word——”

“But draw the counterpane round you, darling; you will take cold else.”

“There it is done; feel: and I’m quite warm. Good night, mother. One kiss—two—three; and before you can count three more I shall be asleep.”

I pretended to be, but I remained awake, listening to her sighs of happiness. Every now and then she passed her fingers over my face, and over my eyes, to learn if they were closed. After a time she fell asleep herself, and her composed peaceful breathing seemed in itself an assurance of returning health.

CHAPTER X.

AT REHEARSAL.

As the curtain falls upon a scene in a drama, and when it rises again, so many years are supposed to have elapsed, so between the closing of the last chapter and the opening of this six months must be supposed to have passed. We are again in London. My mother, thank God, is well, and I have within me the happy assurance that I have nursed her into health; the doctor has told me so, my mother herself has repeated it a hundred times, and I believe it and am humbly grateful.

We are living near to Paradise Row, but not in uncle Bryan's shop. My mother, knowing all that occurred on Jessie's birthday,

showed no surprise when, on returning to London, I took her to some comfortable rooms I had engaged, and said that these were to be our home. She made only one remark—she hoped I would not have any objection to her going to the shop occasionally to see Josey West. I told her I should be glad if she went, and that I intended to go there myself very often.

We are as happy as we can reasonably expect to be. That we have sorrows is certain ; but we refrain from speaking of them. We are as silent concerning our hopes, if we have any.

Nothing has been heard of uncle Bryan ; Josey West conducts the business as though she had been born to it, and it is really prospering under her management. She is such a favourite with all the neighbours that her customers increase every week, and the takings are nearly doubled.

“I think we shall be able to set up a plate window soon,” says Josey West, with a grand air. “The sale of the pills is astonish-

ing, my dear, astonishing! Do you know, Chris, I feel quite like a respectable member of society! I shall soon begin to turn up my nose at play-actors, who are nothing but vagrants, my dear, nothing but vagrants. And they're bad paymasters, Chris; I've two of them on my books already."

When I ask her about Jessie, Josey says that she's all right, and that I have no occasion to bother myself about *her*. I can extract nothing more from her than this, and if I endeavour to press the subject further, she turns snappish.

My mother and I have had many conversations about uncle Bryan, and I think one great cause of her contentment is the altered state of my feelings towards him, which I do not disguise from her. I am prospering in a worldly sense, and when I feel most despondent I work the hardest; it is a relief to me. My name has appeared in print, connected with words of praise, and I often wonder whether Jessie has seen it. As for my mother, when I brought home the paper

containing the two lines in which my work was spoken of favourably, I thought she would have gone wild with joy. I am afraid to say how many times she must have read the few ordinary words, but, knowing what a delight they are to her, I am glad that I have earned them for her sake.

In this way the months roll on. With reference to my feelings towards Jessie, I shall be almost as silent now as I was at home during that time. Sufficient to say that I never forgot her, and that I never loved her less; but her name is rarely mentioned at home.

There is one person, however, to whom I speak of Jessie freely—to Turk West. Turk is getting along capitally in his shop, and has already paid off more than half his debt to Mr. Glover. I see this gentleman occasionally in Turk's shop; Turk shaves him, and dresses his hair for him two or three times a week; whenever I go into the shop and see him there, I retire immediately. I have no wish to injure Turk's business, and

when I reason calmly over matters I cannot see what tangible ground of complaint I have against Mr. Glover—which does not lessen my detestation of him.

“He is a good customer,” says Turk to me, “and it will be best for more reasons than one not to offend him. I can’t say that I like him—although I try to, Chris, my boy, let me tell you—but I know that he is the soul of honour.”

“How *do* you know it?” I ask.

Turk scratches his head. “Well, *he* says it, Chris, my boy, and everybody says it who knows him. He comes from a highly-respectable family.”

I can say nothing in opposition, knowing nothing of his family.

“And it *is* something to be proud of, Chris?” says Turk.

“What *is*, Turk?”

“To be so respectably connected.”

“I suppose so,” I answer indifferently.

Old Mac is a constant visitor at Turk’s shop; indeed, it appears to me that he spends

most of his time there, for whenever I go westward, and open Turk's door, his is the first familiar face I see. He keeps guard, as it were.

"Turk is inside," he says; or "Turk is up-stairs, crimping a lady's hair." For Turk has lady as well as gentleman customers, and has become very skilful in the business. His flow of conversation and anecdote is of great assistance to him; he has always something to say, and, not having been born a barber and hairdresser, he seldom commences about the weather—which is a relief.

On a windy day in April, I visited Turk, and, as usual, found old Mac there. Turk, very busy over some theatrical wigs, looked up from his work, and asked me if I wanted to speak to him. No, I answered; I had merely dropped in as I passed. I had as little excuse for the visit as I had for many others; I only went in the vague hope of hearing something of Jessie. Turk understood this, without being told.

"Business good, Turk?" I inquired.

“First-class,” said Turk. “I shall have to get an assistant I expect. By-the-bye—— Oh, never mind!”

He suddenly interrupted himself, in a confused manner.

“By-the-bye, what, Turk?”

“Nothing,” he replied, bending over his work.

Old Mac looked at me somewhat significantly, and, rising, said he should take a stroll in Covent-garden Market.

“It does one good to walk up and down that arcade,” he said. “One smells the country lanes there. How would it do to have it on the stage, Turk, with real hot-house fruit, and flowers fresh from the market-gardens every night? I daresay it will come to that, in time. The stage is not what it was, my sons.”

Winking at me, old Mac went out, and I, regarding the wink as an invitation to follow him, wished Turk good-morning.

"This is not the way to Covent Garden," I said, as I joined him. "Have you had your morning drain, Mac?"

"No, my son, no," he replied, cheerfully; "and I know a place."

Without more words he conducted me to the "place," where I paid for his morning drain twice over.

"You took my hint, my son," he said, when he had drained his glass, and eaten his lemon; he always ate the slice of lemon after he finished his glass, saying humorously that it was a preparation for the next. "You took my hint."

"You wanted to speak to me I thought, Mac."

"Well, not exactly wanted, my son; but I have something to communicate which may be interesting to you. I know what the tender passion is, and how it burns. I've had my day, and, faith! I'd like to have it over again! It wasn't all sugar, my son. There was one—ah, there was

one, I do remember me, in my hot youth!—

Her lips to mine how often did she join,
Between each kiss her oaths of true love swearing!
How many tales to please me did she coin,
Dreading my love, the loss thereof still fearing!
Yet in the midst of all her pure protesting,
Her faith, her oaths, her tears, and all were jesting.

But what cared I? I whistled her off, and took another, for they're thick as mulberries, my son. And I'd like to have my time over again, pleasures, pains, and all. But this is not to the point, and yet it is, although the lines will not apply—that is to say, I hope not.”

I listened in anxiety; I was well acquainted with old Mac's character by this time, and I knew it would be useless to interrupt him and ask him to come to the point at once; he must come to it his own way.

“Old Mac can tell a hawk from a hand-saw with half an eye,” he continued, “and he has two good ones at his command. Old Mac says to himself, seeing a certain talented

young friend whom he esteems—your health, my son. Ah, I forgot, my glass is empty” —(I was obliged to fill it again; I had no fear of Mac’s getting tipsy on three glasses; he was too well seasoned)—“Old Mac says to himself, what does this talented young friend of his mean by coming so often to Turk West’s establishment? Well, there would be nothing in that, but he comes in unseasonable hours—that is to say, in the hours during which he is supposed to be working for the public. What does that mean? says old Mac, in confidence to himself. Your health, my son. It can mean but one thing. Old Mac knows the signs. And that’s why he winked at you to follow him. *Do you follow me?*”

“Not exactly,” I was obliged to confess, notwithstanding that I had a dim glimmering of what was coming.

Old Mac laughed.

“Well, not to beat about the bush—but I thought I’d lead up to it by easy stages—a certain fair friend of ours is at a certain

place this morning, and I fancied you might like to see her."

My heart beat violently; I knew that he referred to Jessie.

"Did she tell you to come for me?"

He dashed my hopes to the ground by hurriedly replying, "No, no, my son, she knows nothing of it, and had best not know, perhaps. The fact is, our fair friend is about to make her first appearance on the boards, and she is now rehearsing her part. I know the box-keeper, and he will let us into the dress circle, where you can see her without her seeing you."

I thanked him cordially, and we walked together to the theatre, and were admitted to the dress circle, which was in complete darkness. Certainly no one on the stage could distinguish us, but in the dim light I could see all the actors and actresses engaged in the rehearsal. Jessie was among them.

Eight months had passed since I last saw her, and I gazed on her with aching eagerness. It was a cold day, and she was warmly

dressed; and the only change I could discern in her was that she had grown more beautiful. What pain and pleasure I felt as I heard her voice once more, fresh and sweet as ever, and saw the old familiar action of her hands, I cannot describe.

“Steady, my son, steady,” whispered old Mac, warningly.

I controlled myself, without being aware what I had done to excite this remonstrance.

“When does she appear?” I asked in the same low tone.

“Next Monday week.”

“In her own name?”

“No; she has taken the name of Mathews. You will see the announcements outside the theatre. There’s a good deal of curiosity excited about her already, for she plays an ambitious character; she commences at the top instead of at the bottom of the ladder. I should have liked her to begin a little lower down, or to have appeared in the provinces first. There’s one great thing in her favour, though. She plays in a new

piece, and can't be compared to other and more experienced actresses in the same character. There's somebody you know."

He referred to Mr. Glover, whom I had seen before he had, and who, standing at the side wings, appeared to be on familiar terms with all the company; but I knew the lodestone which had drawn him there. When I first caught sight of him Jessie was engaged in a scene; presently she was free for a time, and then he approached her, and they talked together.

"Mac," I said, in a whisper, "I think you are a friend of mine."

"I am proud to hear you say so, my son. I *am* your friend."

"What does that mean?" And I pointed to Jessie and Mr. Glover.

He looked at my agitated face, and then at the two persons I was interested in; but he did not answer me.

"Why don't you speak, Mac? Why don't you answer me?"

“Because I don’t quite understand you, my son.”

“When a person in Mr. Glover’s position,” I said, “pays attention to an actress commencing the world as Jessie is, what does it mean?”

“Speak a little lower, my son. It means that he is interested in her. There’s nothing unusual in that.”

“But it *may* mean something more; it may mean that he is fond of her.”

“It may; and there would be nothing unusual in that. But it does not follow that she is fond of him. Beware of the green-eyed monster, my son. Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend from jealousy! Take a lesson from an old stager.” (But what the lesson was he did not state.) “Why don’t you ask Turk about it.”

“I have my reasons; I would rather Turk should not know anything of this.”

“Well, I’ll find out for you, quietly, between ourselves. Old Mac knows the signs. He has seen a few things, old Mac has. Only

don't you run away with the idea that there's anything wrong in a gentleman speaking to an actress. I daresay it's through him that our fair friend has got this chance. Well, why shouldn't she speak to him, then? I know what you feel, my son. I've felt the same myself, and wouldn't mind feeling so again. It comes in the regular course of things."

I went outside the theatre with him, and made an excuse to get rid of him. Then I waited, in the hope of seeing Jessie; and bearing in mind Jessie's words, "If we meet again it must be at my own time, and in my own way," I resolved not to show myself to her. She came out in the course of half an hour, accompanied by Mr. Glover. I walked behind them at some distance on the opposite side of the road, making many shifts and pretences of looking in shop-windows, so that they should not see me. But Mr. Glover, happening to turn his head in my direction, caught sight of me. I saw the flash of recognition in his eyes. He must

have uttered an exclamation, for Jessie turned and also saw me. I hesitated for one moment ; should I retrace my steps or walk boldly on ? Jessie decided the question for me by running towards me. Her face was scarlet, but that might have been caused by her running too quickly, for her breath came fast.

“O Chris !” she cried, in the first excitement of the moment. “How glad I am to see you ! What brings you this way ?”

She held out her hand eagerly, and I took it, and would have retained it, but that the appearance of Mr. Glover, who paused quite close to us, caused me to relinquish it.

“What brings him this way ?” echoed Mr. Glover. “Not accident, I’ll be bound.”

“I came on purpose to see you, Jessie,” I said ; “I heard through a friend that you were rehearsing this morning, and I gained admission to the dress circle, and sat there for some time.”

“Was it Turk who told you ?” she asked.

“No, not Turk. I think he would not tell

me anything that you did not wish me to know."

It was not without intention that I let this arrow fly. Jessie made no comment upon it, but said,

"And then you waited outside to see me, Chris?"

"Yes; I had no other purpose. But I did not intend that you should see me."

"No? But we'll not quarrel now that we have met. How is mother, Chris?"

"She is well, Jessie. You know that we were very nearly losing her."

"I know; and you took her into the country, and nursed her."

"Thank God, she is well now."

If Mr. Glover had not been present, I should have spoken in a very different manner, but I could not show my heart while he stood by, with a look of cold contempt in his eyes.

"And you?—you are looking thinner, I think, Chris; but you are well and happy."

"Yes," I answered, mechanically, "I am

well and happy, Jessie." Although I strove to speak in an indifferent tone, it must have miserably belied my words.

"And you are getting along famously," continued Jessie hurriedly; "I read your name in the papers, and it made me very proud."

"We shall read your name in the papers soon, Jessie."

"I suppose so; if I have strength and courage to go through with it. I hope you will not come on the first night, Chris."

I was silent, and she was generous enough not to exact the promise.

"At all events, then, if you do come I shall have one friend there," she said.

"Not more than one, Jessie?" asked Mr. Glover, in a tone which made my heart throb violently.

Jessie, looking first at me and then at Mr. Glover, said that she must wish us good-morning, and with her parasol hailed an omnibus that was passing.

“Good-bye, Chris. Will you give my love to mother?”

“Yes, Jessie.”

She drew me aside, out of the hearing of Mr. Glover, and whispered, “Don’t quarrel with him, Chris.”

“I will not, Jessie. One moment. Are you happy?”

She cast a swift glance at me, and then turned her eyes to the ground. “I think so, Chris; I am not sure.” With this singular answer, she pressed my hand, and left me. I watched her get into the omnibus, and when it was out of sight, I turned homewards, without noticing Mr. Glover. But he was at my heels, speaking to me.

“How did you gain admission into the theatre, young man?” he said. “Did you sneak in, or did you tell the doorkeeper a lie?”

“That is my business,” I replied calmly; for I was determined to keep my promise to Jessie.

“Especially your business, I should say—

sneaking and lying. But unless you wish to find yourself in an unpleasant position, I should advise you not to make the attempt again. For Jessie's sake, who might not like to hear of your getting into trouble, I will look over the trespass this once."

"*You* will overlook it!" I retorted, without any outward exhibition of anger. "Is the theatre yours, then?"

"In your own words, that is my business. But I have authority there, believe me; so you must be careful. I should, if I were you, give over the spying business; you will gain nothing by it. Perhaps, however, you have not the manliness to see that the young lady has chosen for herself, and that, as she has removed herself from you and your common surroundings, there is distinct cowardice in your thrusting yourself upon her. Only a gentleman can entertain these proper sentiments——"

"Such a gentlemen as yourself," I interrupted.

"Yes, such a gentleman as I," he said,

with a frown ; “and not only that, but one who knows how to resent impertinence and blackguardly interference.”

I left him suddenly ; if I had not done so he would have fastened a quarrel upon me. I saw clearly that this was his desire ; but I disappointed him.

CHAPTER XI.

OLD MAC EXPRESSES HIS OPINION OF MR.
GLOVER.

THE only person to whom I spoke of my interview with Jessie was my mother, and even to her I did not relate all that had passed.

“Is she coming to see us, my dear?” my mother asked.

I answered that she had given no hint of any such intention.

“Perhaps,” said my mother, “Mr. Glover being by restrained her.”

“Perhaps,” I replied curtly.

As the tone in which I spoke denoted that I did not wish to continue the conversation, my mother said nothing more. Not

that she had grown indifferent to the subject upon which we were conversing, but that she studied my moods more closely than ever. Her heart had never been stirred by such tender love for me as during this time; it showed itself in a thousand little undemonstrative ways, and with a delicate cunning which I am sure has never been excelled, she said and did precisely the things which were most comforting to me. I have only her to thank that my sorrow did not make a cynic of me.

My thoughts ran so much upon Mr. Glover, that I dreamt of him frequently in connection with some singular fancies. The principal persons who played parts in these dreams were we two and Jessie. In one of my dreams he was standing on a height, with his fingers to his mouth, curling his moustache into it as usual; I stood below, at a great distance from him; and Jessie was midway between us. He was beckoning to Jessie, saying in a boastful tone that he was a gentleman and a man of honour,

and Jessie was walking towards him. In another of my dreams he was standing over me, preaching the same text. In another, Turk was very seriously impressing upon me the fact that Mr. Glover came from a highly-respectable family, and that it *was* a thing to be proud of. This was the leading idea of all my dreams.

I did not go again to see Jessie at the rehearsals. I knew I had no right to be in the theatre on those occasions, and I did not intend to give Mr. Glover a chance of placing me in an unpleasant position. I had scarcely a hope of seeing Jessie at our house; my mother thought differently, saying that in certain things she was seldom mistaken, and this was one of them. It was known to me that she had never ceased making inquiries for uncle Bryan, and that she had taken many and many a journey about London in the hope of finding him. I did not question her as to the results of these inquiries, and she herself was silent on the subject.

"Oh," said Josey West to me, a couple of days after I had seen Jessie, "so you've seen her."

"Yes, Josey," I replied, "I have seen her."

"And never told me!" she exclaimed.

"Why should I tell you, Josey? You have kept things from me which I think you might have told me, without doing any great harm."

"Do you, my sweet child? How wise we are, to be sure! But I don't blame you. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I tell you what, Chris! On the first night that Jessie plays, you and I will go arm-in-arm to the theatre."

"No, we will not."

"Why, my sweet child?" she inquired, not in the least disturbed by my abrupt tone.

"Because I have not made up my mind whether I shall be there."

"Oh, indeed!" she said, with a little laugh.

I was not ingenuous in my reply, for I had quite resolved to go, and to go early. During the days that intervened between my meeting with Jessie and her announced first appearance I was very busy with important work. This kept me close to my bench, and I did not have time even to visit Turk, but it did not prevent me from thinking constantly of Jessie. What would be the result if she made a great success? Would she grow into a fine lady, and would her picture be in all the shop-windows? What was the nature of the connection between her and Mr. Glover? What were her feelings now towards her father? I found a hundred different answers to these questions, not one of which brought any satisfaction or consolation to me. But I could not relinquish the consideration of them, and, in the usual way, I extracted from them as much unhappiness as they would fairly yield.

My mother knew where I was going when I prepared myself on the evening

that Jessie was to make her first appearance before the public, and as she kissed me she said she did not expect me home very early. I nodded, and left her. I could not trust myself to speak, for I felt as though my own fate were about to be definitely decided by the issue of this night's events. I arrived at the theatre before the time announced for the opening of the doors, and to my surprise, instead of finding, as I expected, a great mass of people pressing towards the entrances, I found a few scores of persons standing loosely about the closed doors, grumbling and wondering at notices which were pasted on the walls to the effect that in consequence of the indisposition of the new actress the opening of the theatre was postponed. The disappointment to those assembled was the greater because the play in which Jessie was to appear was the first dramatic work of a new author, who, although his name was not given on the bills, it was said was a nobleman well-known in fashionable circles. While I was reading the

notice, and tormenting myself with the idea that Jessie must be seriously ill, Turk accosted me.

"Hallo, Chris," he said, hooking his arm in mine; "this is a surprise, isn't it?"

"Is Jessie very ill, Turk?" I asked anxiously.

He looked at me inquiringly, seemingly in doubt as to whether I was in earnest in asking the question. I repeated it.

"I do not think so," he replied.

"Have you seen her lately, Turk?"

"Not since Saturday, Chris; then she appeared to be well. That notice is only put up as an excuse. There's a hitch with the author, or the lessee, or the man who advances the money, I expect."

"I should like to know if Jessie is really well," I said.

"Go round to my shop, then; here's the key. I'll make inquiries and come to you soon."

I went to the shop, and unlocked the door, and as it was dark inside, I lit the gas. I

had not been in the place many minutes before old Mac poked in his head.

“I saw a light,” he said, entering, and closing the door behind him. “Ah, Chris, my son, it’s you, is it? This is a rum go, isn’t it? Where’s Turk?”

“He’ll be here presently. You mean about the theatre, don’t you?”

“I do, my son. So our fair friend doesn’t make her appearance after all. Well, the loss is the public’s. The stage is going to the dogs. Going! Gone, I should say. Not conducted on safe principles, my son. Elements introduced into the management of theatrical matters which have no business there at all. Where’s your school for acting nowadays, I should like to know. How do men and women come to be actors and actresses? Where’s the education for the profession? Once upon a time—ah, well, no matter. Drown dull care. Anything to drink about?” He looked around for the desired bottle. I could not assist him in his search, and did not desire to do so, for it seemed to me that

he had already had a glass too much. "Closed through the indisposition of the new actress!" he continued. "That's the way the public is gulled. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in their philosophy. Look here, my son. A word in your ear."

This word in my ear was a whispered request for a trifling loan of two shillings and sevenpence. He always asked for loans in a whisper, even when there was no third person near. It was not the first time I had lent old Mac small sums of money, and I pulled three shillings from my pocket, not having the coins for the exact sum. He gravely gave me fivepence change.

"Thank you, my son," he said, "and now a word to the wise. On a certain morning you and I went to the Rialto—no, to a rehearsal in which our fair friend took part."

"Yes."

"You confided your woes to me, not in words, perhaps, but in look, accent, manner. Old Mac knows the signs. The liquid eye,

the tremulous tone, the sighs that come unbidden. I saw them all, my son, and my sympathising breast received them as a sacred deposit. You remember the lines I quoted : ‘Her lips to mine how often did she join!’ But I see that you are impatient, my son. You said to me then that you believed I was your friend. I answered in suitable terms. The word to the action, the action to the word. Shake hands, my son.” (By this time I had fully made up my mind that old Mae was tipsy, although he was as steady as a rock ; it was only his voice that betrayed him.) “To continue. You drew my attention to two persons who shall be nameless, one of whom was paying attentions to the other, and you asked what it meant. I replied in general terms, and after warning you to beware of the green-eyed monster, I said that I would find out, in a quiet way, what those attentions meant, and that I would let you know, in a quiet way. Am I correct, and do you follow me ?”

I said that he was quite correct, and that I was following his words.

“I placed myself at once in communication with our fair friend——”

I was surprised into an exclamation by this information. In no way disturbed, old Mac went on.

“I did. I placed myself at once in communication with our fair friend——”

“You did not mention my name, I hope,” I could not help saying.

“Was I born yesterday, do you think, my son, or the day before? I had some slight acquaintance with our fair friend, as you know, and I threw myself in her way. That is what I mean when I say I placed myself in communication with her. I read her part for her, and gave her a hint or two, which she received and thanked me for in a manner very different from some lady stars I could mention, who think themselves above tuition because they have pretty faces, and because they happen to have made a third or a fourth-rate success. They come to grief

in the long run, my son, these clever ladies. They shine for a little while, with much outside pushing and puffing, and then, Out, out, brief candle! Our fair friend is a different kind of creature. She is amiability, sweetness, and modesty combined, and when the old actor ventured to throw out a hint or two as to emphasis in certain places, as to appropriate action, as to where and how a point could be made, she received them with gratitude and deference. Damme, my son! the old actor could not help wishing he was a thirty years younger man; and then again he was glad he wasn't, because it might have interfered with the chances of a young friend of his, whom he sees before him now. But if I don't hurry on with my story, you will be applying to me Hamlet's words to Polonius, 'These tedious old fools!' The old actor doesn't mind giving himself a rub, you see. Well, having fairly established himself in the sweet graces of the young lady, old Mac, from his point of observation, kept one eye steadily fixed upon a certain gentle-

man, whose name commences with G, and who seems to have a habit of biting his nails—a sign of ill-temper, my son. Old Mac was on the watch, my son—‘On the Watch,’ a fine title for a drama, and I wish I had time to write it. This gentleman, whose name commences with G did not appear to relish the observation of the old actor, which was not, for that reason, relaxed, depend upon it. And now, old Mac has but few words to add. If, having reason to suspect the honesty of the intentions of this gentleman whose name commences with a G, the old actor sounded him artfully, and learnt enough to convince him that his suspicions were correct, and if, being thus satisfied or dissatisfied, the old actor gradually and delicately opened a certain young lady’s eyes to the true state of affairs, you may depend that he did it partly out of the friendship he entertains for a fine young fellow—shake hands, my son—partly out of his contempt for a certain person whose fingers are always playing with his moustache,

but chiefly out of his admiration for a young lady, whose beauty, grace, virtue, and modesty are unparalleled in the experience of an old fellow who has seen the world, and knows the stuff that men and women are made of."

Ambiguous as this speech was—and old Mac seemed to make it purposely mysterious, and to enjoy it—I thoroughly understood it, and I thanked the speaker cordially. My heart felt lighter after it, and when Turk returned—old Mac being gone—I met him with a smile on my face.

"Has any one been here, Chris?" he asked, as he entered.

"Only old Mac; it is scarcely two minutes since he left."

"No one else?"

"No, Turk. Have you found out about Jessie?"

"I have reason to believe she is quite well," replied Turk, "and that the notice is only a blind. I thought Mr. Glover might have called."

"No; he has not been here. Did you expect to see him?"

Turk, without replying to my question, commenced to walk up and down his shop, which unusual proceeding on his part caused me to observe him more closely. An expression of perplexity was on his face, and I questioned him concerning it.

"I asked you once," he said, somewhat awkwardly, "if you were in trouble. You will remember it—on the anniversary of Jessie's birthday."

"I remember, Turk."

"Yours, you said, was not a money trouble."

"But yours is, Turk?"

"Yes; chiefly. Partly my own, partly another person's. Chris, if I speak vaguely, it is because I am on my parole; I mustn't break my word. Now we can trust one another, I think?"

"I am sure I can trust you, Turk."

"And that is just what I want," he said, with a perplexed look.

“What is?”

“Trust. It is a tremendous misfortune, sometimes, to be a poor hard-up devil, not to be able to lay one’s hand on a five-pound note. Generally, it doesn’t matter; as a rule, I am happy enough with half-a-crown in my pocket, and owing no man anything. Chris, I want a large sum of money. Can you tell me where to borrow it, on my word of honour?”

“How much, Turk?”

“Eighty pounds.”

I had more than that saved out of my earnings.

“I can lend it to you, Turk,” I said, quite gladly.

“You, Chris! Your own money?”

“My own money—money that I have saved.”

“And you will lend it to me on *that* security?”

“What better do I want from you, Turk?”

He resumed his walk, and was silent for

a few moments. When he paused before me, there was a soft bright light in his eyes.

"It's good to have a friend. But, first, let me tell you. Only twenty pounds of the eighty are for myself. I want that sum to pay off my debt to Mr. Glover. The other sixty is for another person ; and I shall be quite twelve months in paying you back."

"I am satisfied, and more so, because you will be free, and out of Mr. Glover's clutches. I can give you the money to-night. Mother has it."

"Is it all you have saved, Chris?"

"No ; I shall have a little left."

"Then, when I've paid Mr. Glover, I can give you a bill of sale over my stock." He looked round upon his wigs and other theatrical property. "It is worth the money."

"I can't lend to you upon that security, Turk. The first you mentioned is the only security I can accept."

He laughed a little huskily.

"All right, Chris, my boy. I'll borrow the money on those terms. This may be a

good night's work for all of us. I never thought that Turk West's word would be good for eighty pounds. But stranger things than that might occur, eh, Chris?"

I acquiesced, although I had not the slightest idea of his meaning.

"If you knew," he continued, "the relief it will be to me to get out of Mr. Glover's clutches, as you called it, you would be surprised."

I was sufficiently surprised at the change that was apparent in his tone concerning Mr. Glover, whom he had hitherto extolled so highly.

"Damn all professional money-lenders, I say!" he exclaimed excitedly. "And if ever I believe again in a man with a handle on the top of his head, my name's not Turk West."

I could not help laughing at these singular words.

"Ah, you may laugh, Chris; but the first time he sat in that chair—the very one you are sitting in now, Chris, my boy—

and asked me to shampoo him, and I felt the knob, it made me curious. I thought he had been fighting, or had knocked his head against something, but he told me he was born with it. That sort of thing runs in families, I should say. If he had it, his father must have had it before him. Look here, Chris; you are good at figures—I never was. See how I stand with him.”

He produced some papers and receipts, all of which bore reference to the account he had with Mr. Glover. I examined them, and found that he had paid Mr. Glover a large interest for the money he had borrowed. He had already paid the full sum of seventy-five pounds advanced, and there were still, as he himself had calculated, twenty pounds odd to be paid before he could call himself free. I made out a clear statement, and gave it to Turk.

“Mr. Glover has managed to make a large profit out of you, Turk.”

“Yes, and I don’t know how it has been

done. I was to pay ten per cent. for the money, I understood; but what with one thing and another—lawyer's charges, drawing up of deeds that were not required, I am sure, signing of printed papers, inquiry fees, and a dozen other things—it has come to a deal more."

"I see that you only received sixty-five pounds," I said busy over another calculation.

"That is all."

"So that," I continued, having finished my calculation, which I handed to Turk, "you will see that, when you pay the balance to-morrow, Mr. Glover will have received at the rate of at least sixty per cent. per annum for the loan. Not much of a friend in that, Turk?"

"No, I should say not; I have only rightly understood this, and other things in connection with Mr. Glover as well, within the last week."

"Perhaps," I ventured to say, "you do not now think me so unreasonable in the dislike I took to him."

“It is I who was wrong, Chris, my boy. I see that now.”

“Do you know, Turk, it pleases me in some way to be convinced that he is not the soul of honour, as you tried to make me believe?”

“There, there, Chris—let’s say no more about him.”

“We’ll be done with him presently. I don’t know how it was, but I suspected and disliked him from the first. That trick of his of curling his moustache into his mouth—old Mac told me he bites his nails—”

I cannot tell what it was that made me pause suddenly here, but pause I did, and the sentence was not concluded.

“Do you know where Jessie lives, Turk?”

“Yes, Chris, but you mustn’t ask me to tell you. I am on my parole.” He repeated this statement with a certain air of enjoyment.

“Very well,” I said. “But can you tell me when Jessie is likely to make her appearance——”

He interrupted me, and asked me as a

favour to change the subject; and as I saw that I made him uneasy by my questions, I discontinued them. He walked home with me, and I gave him the money.

"I wonder," he said, as he pocketed it, "that you haven't asked me what I wanted the other sixty pounds for."

"I have been going to ask half a dozen times," I replied, "but I thought it might be another of your secrets."

"It is a secret," he said, with a smile. "And if you had asked, I shouldn't have told you."

Certainly, Turk was playing a most mysterious part; but I trusted him thoroughly, knowing what a good fellow he was.

My mother was surprised to see me home so early, and more so when she heard what had taken place.

"I have a presentiment, my dear," she said, "that this is going to turn out a fortunate night for us."

We went to the shop in the course of the night, and there was Josey West behind the

counter, as busy as a bee, serving the customers, and chattering away like any magpie. Uncle Bryan would scarcely have known the shop. Josey had had it cleaned and painted, and the scales and counter, and nests of drawers in which the spices and more valuable commodities were kept, had been so smartened up that they looked like new. You could see your face in every bit of brass about the place. During a lull in the business, Josey came into the little parlour where we were sitting.

“It’s wonderful,” she said; “we’ve taken eleven shillings already for pills and mixture. I’m beginning to get frightened. If an inspector of something or other were to come in and analyse us, I should drop down in a fit. Turk says there’s nothing to be afraid of, but I’m not so sure of that.” Presently, however, she derived consolation from the reflection that, after all, the medicine could not possibly do any one any harm.

“Have you been to the theatre, Josey?” I asked.

“ If you ask no questions, my sweet child,” was her reply, “ you’ll be told no stories. Theatres ! As if I haven’t something a thousand times more important to attend to ! ”

For all that, she found time to have a quiet chat with Turk, and when he went away she called me into the shop, and saying she had something very particular to whisper to me, kissed me instead of making any communication ; by which sign I knew that Turk had told her of the money I had lent him. She shut up the shop earlier than usual, and we had supper together. I had not had a meal in the little parlour for many months, and my mind was filled with the memorable incidents in my life with which the room was connected. It was just such a night as that on which Jessie had tapped at the door, years ago, when uncle Bryan was asleep, and my mother and I were sitting together. I remembered the story I was reading, “ *Picciola*,” and during a silence I raised my head to the door, with something of expectation in my mind. I dismissed the fancy instantly, but it

was not unpleasant to me to think of what had occurred on that night—the conversation in the shop between Jessie and my mother, the awakening of uncle Bryan, and the first passage-at-arms between the child and the old man. My mother must have divined the current in which my thoughts were running, for she took my hand under the table, and held it fondly in hers.

“I can’t help liking the little room, after all, mother,” I said.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE DREAM.

MY mother and I stopped up talking until very late on this night. The future was not mentioned; all our talk was of the past. My mother recalled the reminiscences of her younger days, and dwelt upon them with affection. She drew pictures of her home when she was a girl, and told me a great deal concerning her parents, and especially concerning my grandmother, of whom my own impressions were so vivid. As though she were living her life over again, she travelled from those days gradually to the day upon which she first saw my father, and in tender tones related many incidents of their courtship which I had never before

heard. She required a great deal of coaxing before she would speak of her courting days, but I led her on artfully from one thing to another, and listened to her with delight. On such occasions as this my mother seemed to grow twenty years younger; her face grew fresher, rounder, and in her eyes the soft light of youth lived again. Then came the description of her wedding-day, and she laughed or grew pensive as she recalled the names of those who were present, stopping occasionally, until I said, "Yes, mother, and then,"—upon which she took up my words, saying, "And then, my dear,"—and proceeded with her descriptions. When, in the course of her narration, I came into the world, I was able to take a larger share in the conversation, and I added my experience to hers. We were by turns grave and merry, according to the nature of our reminiscences. My grandmother's peculiarities, her death, the search for the long stocking, and the picture of Snaggletooth ripping open the beds and the arm-chairs, and sitting on the floor with

his hair full of feathers; then on to my father's burial, and my illness, and the removal farther and farther away from our native town until we found ourselves in London—scarcely anything, except what was painful, was left unspoken of.

“And there's an end to it all, mother,” I said, when we had brought the reminiscences up to the very night upon which we were conversing.

“No, my dear,” she replied, with a tender shake of her head, “not an end; there are brighter pages to come in my darling's life.”

“Do you know, mother,” I said, as I stood by her side at the door of her bedroom, “I have often thought of grandmother's long stocking, and fancied that one day we should find a treasure somewhere.”

My mother laughed.

“Why, my dear, where on earth would you look for it? We have not a thing left that belonged to your grandmother?”

“Yes, we have; you don't forget that

brown monkey-man that used to stand on the mantelshelf and wag its head at us?"

"I remember it perfectly, dear child; you don't mean to say you have kept it all this time?"

"It is in my box now; I shall take it out to-night, and have a look at it."

"You don't suppose the treasure is in that," said my mother, laughing.

"No; though Jessie and I did think one day that we had made a discovery. Good-night, mother."

"Good-night, dear child, and God bless you. Remember, my dear, there are brighter pages to come, and your mother will live to see them."

That, before she went to sleep, she prayed for those brighter days, I was certain, but I scarcely dared to hope that what she so fondly desired would ever take place.

Before I went to bed I took from my box the stone image of the brown monkey-man; it was at the very bottom of my box, which I had not opened for many months, for the

reason that it contained all the sketches I had made of Jessie, and which I had put away when I lost her. But for these, and the tender thought which they excited, I should have given more attention to the stone image, which looked uglier and more repulsive than ever. How such a hideous thing could be considered an ornament it puzzled me to think; but it occurred to me that there were more flagrant violations of art than this. On the previous day I had seen a ghastly death's-head pin in the cravat of a coxcomb, who seemed very proud of it. I set the image of the monkey-man on the mantelshelf, and slowly replaced the sketches in my box, lingering over them with fond regret.

Among them I found a sketch with the name of "Anthony Bullpit" at the foot, and I remembered that it was a fancy drawing I had made of my grandmother's lover, after reading the account of his arrest by the detective Vinnicombe, elsewhere narrated; a sneaking figure was Anthony Bullpit, as I

had represented him, with his hang-dog look and hypocritical face, gnawing at his fingernails. I pushed it out of sight, and turned again to the contemplation of my sketches of Jessie, over which I spent a sad and tender quarter of an hour. Then, with a sigh, I closed the box and locked it, and went to bed. It was my habit of a night to lie awake for a few minutes with the candle alight on a chair close to my bed. Generally I passed these minutes in reading, but on this night "I lay a-thynkinge," and did not open my book. Directly opposite the head of my bed was the mantelshelf, with the smoke-dried monkey of a man in stone on it, and this was the last thing that presented itself to my sight before I blew out the light. Restless as I was with the events of the evening, and with the conversation which had taken place between my mother and myself, I was tired enough to fall asleep within a very few moments. But I was not too tired to dream; my body was asleep, but my imagination was never

more active. To me, the most wonderful feature in the physiology of dreams has always been the fact that time, the dominant and inexorable tyrant which rules and guides our course, and regulates the passions and emotions of life, is in our sleep utterly set at naught; a lifetime is compressed in a moment, as it were, and between waking and sleeping a hundred years of history are played out. I think I must have dreamt of every important event in my life, and of many in the lives of others; they presented themselves to me without coherence or sequence, and there was but one consistent feature in my fancies—the figure of the monkey-man, which was never absent. I dreamt of Snaggletooth and Snaggletooth's wife. She was relating the stories of the Cock Lane Ghost and Old Mother Shipton, as she had related them in the kitchen on the night my father lay dying up-stairs, but in my dream she was not speaking to me, but to the monkey-image, which gravely wagged its head at her as she proceeded; Snaggletooth was running

up and down the stairs, and poking in the oddest corners, in his search for the long stocking, and the monkey-man was assisting him frantically, running at his heels, and tearing things open with fiendish haste ; I was in the mourning coach, following my father's body to the churchyard, and the monkey-man was sitting opposite to me, grinning at me ; Snaggleteeth was carrying me out of the churchyard, and as I opened my eyes, the monkey-man, squatting on Snaggleteeth's shoulder, squinted at me. In the same way the image presented itself in every incident connected with Jessie and my mother and uncle Bryan ; and when I lay trembling in bed, and Jane Painter stood in my bed-room in the dark telling me stories of blood and murder, the monkey-man prowled about the floor, and dropped from the ceiling, and crept from under my bed, and sat on my pillow with its ugly face illumined. When Jessie knocked at the shop-door, as she had done years ago for the first time, and my mother opened it, the monkey-man entered

first, and jumped on to the table ; and on the night of the amateur performance at Josey West's the monkey-man was among the audience, seated in a place of honour. Suddenly all this chaos of persons and circumstances came to an end, and there were only my grandmother, and I, and the monkey-figure sitting together. I was in my little low chair, my grandmother, very stately and grand, was in her arm-chair, and the monkey-man was on the mantelshelf. Said my grandmother, in my dream, in a very distinct tone, "He had a knob on the top of his head, and was always eating his nails." I looked at the monkey-man for confirmation of her words, and it said, in a stony voice, "He had a knob on the top of his head, and was always eating his nails." After this confirmation, my grandmother continued, "And the last time I set eyes on him was on my wedding-day." Again I looked at the monkey-man, and again it confirmed my grandmother's statement, but with a slight difference this time, "And the last time we set

eyes on him was on our wedding-day." Which inference on the part of the monkey-man of being my grandfather somewhat disturbed me. Now, at this point of my fancies, what on earth brought old Mac, the actor, into the scene? There he was, however, face to face with the monkey-man, who questioned him as a lawyer would have done. "What do you say his name commences with?" asked the monkey-man. "It commences with a G," replied old Mac. "And what is that habit of his that you say is a sign of ill-temper?" asked the monkey-man. "Biting his nails," replied old Mac; "he is always at it." By this time my dream has resolved itself into a court of inquiry; the monkey-man is dressed in a wig and gown, which do not hide his ugliness; my grandmother, very broad and portly, sits as judge, and I, it seems, am in some way the criminal whose case is being tried, for my grandmother nods her head at me continually, and says, "Perhaps you will believe me now; all these things happened

on my wedding-day." Old Mac fades away, and is replaced by Turk West. "Damn all professional money-lenders, I say," he cries ; "and if ever I believe again in a man with a handle on the top of his head, my name's not Turk West." "Hold your tongue," calls out the monkey-man ; "who wants to know what your name is ? We'll come to names presently. When did you first discover the handle ?" "It isn't a handle," says Turk, in correction, "it's a knob." My grandmother nods in confirmation. "He had a knob on the top of his head," she says, "and he was always biting his nails." "I don't know about that," says Turk, "but his fingers are always at his moustache, and he is the soul of honour, and comes from a highly-respectable family." "That he does," adds my grandmother. "Poor Anthony ! He proposed and wished to run away with me, but my family stepped in and prevented him." "Very wrong," says Turk gravely ; "wasn't his family respectable enough for them ? The soul of honour !" "Quite so," says my

grandmother. "He told me, after I had accepted this child's grandfather" (at this point of my dream I become suddenly a child in a pinafore), that life was valueless to him without me, and that as he had lost me, he would be sure to go to the devil." "Did he go?" asks the monkey-man. "I always found him a man of his word," replies my grandmother. "Now attend to me, sir," cries the monkey-man, in a bullying tone, turning suddenly upon Turk; "when did you say you first discovered this knob?" "Last week," replies Turk, "when he sat in that chair" (the chair comes into the dream) "and told me to shampoo him." "You were surprised when you felt it?" asks the monkey-man. "I was," says Turk, "and I asked him if he had knocked his head against something. He said, no, that he was born with it." "And what was the remark," continues the monkey-man, levelling a threatening finger at me, "you made to the prisoner at the bar?" "I said," says Turk, "that that sort of thing runs in

families, and that if he had it, his father must have had it before him." Suddenly, and as if it were quite in the natural order of things, we are all listening to the statement of a new witness who has risen in Turk's place. "I am an officer in the detective force, and my name is Vinnicombe. From information received I went to Liverpool, and tracked Anthony Bullpit on board the *Prairie Bird*, bound for America. 'It's no use making a noise about it,' I says to him, as I slipped the handcuffs on him; 'I want you, Anthony Bullpit. You shan't be done out of a voyage across the sea, but Botany Bay's the place as'll suit you best, I should think.'" Here my grandmother bristles up, "You're an infamous designing creature," she screams. "He is no more guilty than I am." "He pleads guilty, at all events," is the detective's reply. "That is to spite me," says my grandmother, "and to prove that he's a man of his word." Then, by quite an easy transition, the court and the crowd fade away, and my grandmother, I, and the monkey-

figure are again in the little parlour, and she is saying to me, "Your grandfather has much to answer for, child. Mr. Bullpit was transported for twenty-one years. Some wicked people said it was a mercy he wasn't hanged. If he had been, I should never have survived it. Poor Anthony!" "You would like to have a peep at him, I daresay," says the monkey-man to me, my grandmother having disappeared; "come along, I'll show him to you." And in the same moment we are peeping through the keyhole of Turk West's shop-door at the figure of Mr. Glover, who sits in the chair with his fingers at his lips. Here a sudden movement or noise partially awakes me.

With all the details of this strange dream in my mind I lay for a few moments half-asleep and half-awake, endeavouring to bring the confused particulars into some kind of order; but the only thing that was clear to me was the connection that had been created between Anthony Bullpit and Mr. Glover. As I gradually returned to full consciousness, this connection seemed to become something

more than a fancy. That the knob on Anthony Bullpit's head, of which I heard so much from my grandmother's lips in my young days, was reproduced, according to Turk West's testimony, on the head of Mr. Glover, was certainly no fancy; Anthony Bullpit bit his nails; Mr. Glover had the same objectionable habit. Stranger discoveries were made every day than the discovery that Mr. Glover was Anthony Bullpit's son. If this were so, what became of Mr. Glover's boast that there was not a stain upon his good name, and that his character and the character of all his family were above reproach? It occurred to me here that his ardent desire to make people believe this sprang from the fact that he had something disreputable to conceal. What made me so anxious in the matter was, that if there were a solid foundation to the suspicion, and if I could prove a connection between Mr. Glover and Anthony Bullpit the convict, then I had a lever in my hands which I could use to good effect against

Mr. Glover — a lever which I believed would cause him at once to cease his attentions to Jessie. That he had laid her under an obligation to him was evident, and he might be inclined to persecute her in consequence. The lever I speak of was the printed account by Vinnicombe, the detective, of the arrest and conviction of Anthony Bullpit for the robbery from the bank.

I rose and lit the candle, and taking the mouldy old paper from the hollow of the stone monkey-figure, I read it carefully. I was particularly struck in the reading by the description given by the detective of the peculiarity in Anthony Bulpit's teeth. If that peculiarity existed in the teeth of Mr. Glover, it would be almost impossible to resist the conviction that he was Anthony Bullpit's son. I set to work at once, and made a fair copy of the "Remarkable Discovery of a Forger by the Celebrated Detective, Mr. Vinnicombe." At nine o'clock in the morning I was in Turk West's shop, with the manuscript in my pocket.

CHAPTER XIII.

EXIT MR. GLOVER.

TURK regarded me with surprise.

“An early visitor, Chris,” he said.

“Yes,” I answered ; “I have come on some very particular business. When do you pay the balance of your debt to Mr. Glover?”

“I expect him here at twelve o’clock. I shall pay him then.”

“Can you give me half an hour or so of your undivided attention, Turk?”

“Certainly I can : a couple of hours, if you want them.”

“Then sit down, and read this quietly,” I said, handing him the Remarkable Confession, “and don’t make a remark upon it until you have finished.”

He read it attentively, and returned it to me with a thoughtful look.

"It is cut from an old newspaper, printed a good many years ago, Turk. Do you find anything singular in it?"

"I do; something very singular indeed; but how on earth did you come across it, Chris?"

"I will tell you another time. First, I want to know what it is that strikes you as singular in the account."

"Well, Chris, there's the knob in this Bull-pit's head——"

"Yes, Turk."

"Mr. Glover has one precisely similar on his head."

I could scarcely restrain the expression of my satisfaction at this proof that, without prompting, his thoughts were taking the same direction as mine.

"Yes, you told me so, Turk; and that sort of thing runs in families, you said."

"I did say so, and I think so."

"Mr. Glover said he was born with it."

"Yes, he told me so distinctly," said Turk, with a puzzled look.

"That's all right, then. What else do you find singular in it, Turk?"

"Well, there's that habit of Anthony Bullpit's of biting his nails. Mr. Glover does the same."

"Yes; anything else?" I asked eagerly.

"Well, Chris, the teeth. Mr. Glover's two middle teeth in his top jaw have just the kind of slit between them that caused the detective to discover Anthony Bullpit, for all his disguise."

I uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"Now, what do you make of all this, Turk? Do you think it possible that such remarkable peculiarities can exist in two men without there being a relationship between them? Turk, as sure as I stand here, Mr. Glover is Anthony Bullpit's son. Don't interrupt me. If he is a convict's son, what becomes of his good character and his unblemished name, of which he is always preaching, as you know? He trades upon it, Turk—he trades

upon it; and if it were made public that his father was a forger and a convicted thief, it would be the greatest blow he could receive. This man is a scoundrel, Turk; a scoundrel and a hypocrite."

"I believe he is, Chris," said Turk, carried away probably by my hot words; "but what good can come of exposure—what good to you, I mean?"

"Why, Turk, are you blind? Can't you see that I can make the best use in the world of this strange discovery?"

I told him rapidly what had passed between old Mac and me, and the opinion which the old actor entertained of Mr. Glover, and then I developed my own plan of action.

"It is very simple, Turk. I want Mr. Glover immediately to cease his attentions to Jessie, whose eyes, according to old Mac's account, have only lately been opened to his real character. Jessie, I have no doubt, is under obligations to him; and he may take advantage of this to persecute her. If he does this, I shall expose him; but I

shall first give him a chance of withdrawing himself voluntarily. I think there will be no reason to fear that he will prove an active enemy; the proof that I hold will take the sting out of him——”

“But,” interposed Turk, “what if these personal marks should be mere coincidences, and no relationship exists between Anthony Bullpit and Mr. Glover?”

“We shall learn that very soon,” I replied. “I shall send him this copy of the Remarkable Discovery with a few words of my own. If he is quiet after their receipt, we may be sure that our suspicions are correct. I know he is a scoundrel—I have been convinced of that all along, Turk, notwithstanding your defence of him—and I believe him to be a coward. We shall see. Will you let me be present while you are paying him the balance you owe him?”

“I have no objection, Chris.”

“And if I happen to say something to him — something to the point — you’ll not mind, perhaps.”

“Say whatever you like, Chris, my boy.”

“I want a promise from you, Turk. Not a word of all this to Jessie.”

“All right, Chris.”

Exactly at twelve o'clock Mr. Glover entered the shop. I was in the back-room, and I listened quietly to the few words that passed, in the course of which Turk told Mr. Glover that he was enabled to pay him the balance of the account between them. Mr. Glover said that it might stand, if Turk wished, but Turk insisted on paying him, and produced the money. As Mr. Glover was signing the receipt, Turk threw open the door of the room in which I was sitting, and said,

“Chris, perhaps you would not mind witnessing Mr. Glover's signature.”

Mr. Glover looked up with anger in his face, and our eyes met. I quietly placed my name on the paper as a witness, and then, with a glance at Mr. Glover's signature, I handed the paper to Turk.

"So now, Turk," I said, with a smile, "I am your creditor instead of Mr. Glover."

I saw that Turk did not understand why I made this apparently unnecessary statement.

"Oh," said Mr. Glover, with a sneer, "it is your money, then, with which Turk West has paid his debt!"

"Yes," I replied. "Turk is safer in my hands than in the hands of a money-lender who charges sixty per cent. What was it you said yesterday, Turk? Damn all professional money-lenders, wasn't it? So say I."

Mr. Glover glanced from me to Turk, and from Turk to me, while his face grew dark with passion.

"I have been thinking, Turk," I continued, regarding Mr. Glover steadily, "what would be the value of a receipt for money paid, supposing the name of the person at the foot of the paper is not his own. How would it stand in law, Mr. Glover? Supposing a person whose real name was Bullpit——"

I saw instantly that the shot had taken

effect. The dark shade of passion disappeared from Mr. Glover's face, which was now quite white. Added to this, the startled exclamation which escaped him was a sufficient confirmation.

"You shall hear from me," he said, in a thick voice, as he turned to leave the shop.

"You shall hear from me first," I replied; "within two hours I will leave a letter for you at your house."

I wrote my letter at once in Turk's shop. The substance of it was that I enclosed a copy of an account of the arrest and conviction of a criminal well known in Hertford many years ago; that this criminal had on his person peculiar marks which were almost certain to be transmitted to his children; that the history of this criminal was known only to me and Turk West; that the secret of it would be faithfully kept if the person to whom my letter was addressed would immediately cease to honour with his attentions any of the lady friends of the writer; and that if this condition were not accepted

and carried out in its full letter and spirit, means would be immediately adopted for making public the Remarkable Discovery, and the subsequent history of the forger and thief. I did not mention any names, but Turk West said that Mr. Glover would understand my meaning. I left the letter with its enclosure at Mr. Glover's house, and received no answer. Three days afterwards Turk came to tell me that Mr. Glover had left on a tour to Germany.

"I have other news for you as well," he said: "the theatre in which Jessie was to have appeared is let to a French Company for three months."

I asked Turk no questions, remembering what he had said as to his being on his parole, but I worked that day with a heart less sad than it had been for many a long month past.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOSEY WEST LAMENTS HER CROOKED LEGS.

EXACTLY three weeks had passed since Mr. Glover's departure, and I may here take the opportunity of mentioning that, although I have seen the gentleman subsequently on two or three occasions, we have avoided each other by mutual consent—a state of things with which I am perfectly contented. The connection between him and Turk West is also completely severed, so that he has, as it were, dropped out of our lives. During the above-mentioned interval, nothing of importance transpired; my mind was busy with possibilities, but I saw no clear way of playing an active part in their development. My mother, during this time, and especially during

the past week, had been out a great deal; I guessed that she was still searching for uncle Bryan, and I should have been happy to learn from her lips that she had been successful in finding him. Within a few days of the time of which I am writing, I entertained a suspicion that she had obtained a clue, for when she came home her eyes were bright, and there was an expression of great happiness in her face; but I said nothing to her. I knew that I should soon hear good news if she had any to tell. The special direction of my thoughts may easily be understood by an observation I made to my mother one afternoon at the end of the three weeks.

"Mother," I said, "I think you ought to go and see Jessie."

She looked up with glad eyes.

"Some feeling with regard to myself," I continued, "may prevent Jessie from coming to you here, and I think it would be a good thing for you to go to her. I know she loves you and would be glad to see you, and you may be able to counsel and advise her.

Turk West knows where she lives, and, although he would not tell me if I asked him, I believe he would tell you readily."

"Do you think so, dear child?" she asked. "Then I will go to him, and tell him what you say."

The voice is a great tell-tale, and I knew by the tone in which my mother spoke that my suggestion had given her pleasure.

"There is no time like the present," I said.

My mother rose immediately, and put on her bonnet.

"I shall leave off work at eight o'clock," I said, so that she might understand I did not wish her to hurry back, "and then I shall go round to Josey West for an hour."

She nodded, and stood looking over my shoulder as I worked.

"If I see Jessie," she said, and paused.

"Yes, mother, if you see her—I hope you will see her."

"I hope so too, dear child. Shall I give her any message from you?"

“Not unless she asks after me, mother; then you may give her my love.”

There was the merest trembling in my voice as I said this, but it was sufficient to agitate my mother's soul. I laid my graver aside, and said,

“You see how it is, mother; I cannot do or act otherwise. Jessie could not know more about me and my feelings if I stood at her door all day long. I never loved her more than I do now, and I believe I shall never love her less; it would not be true if I said I was happy, but I am far happier than I deserve to be. My mother is still left to me, thank God!”

“Dear child! dear child!” she murmured, with tender caresses.

“And you must not think it strange, mother, if I don't ask you questions when you come back. You will tell me whatever is worth telling. Now, one other word, and then you must run away, for I have work to finish. Should you meet with uncle Bryan——”

"Would you wish me to, my dear?" she asked, wistfully.

"Yes," I answered; "I should like you to find him. If you do, give him my love also, and say that I should like to come to see him, if he will not come to us. And, remember, mother, if he wants for anything, all that I have is his; but for him I should not have been in my present position. As for the past, let bygones be bygones. As Americans would say, I should be truly happy to shake hands with him on that platform."

My mother kissed me, and went out of the room. I thought she had started on her errand, but she returned in a quarter of an hour, with a bunch of wallflowers in her hand.

"I only came in to show you these, my dear," she said; "smell them—they are very sweet. You have not studied the language of flowers, have you, my dear?"

"No, mother."

"Then you don't know what wallflowers

stand for," she said, with a bright smile. "Now this is for you, my dear; it is the first rose I have seen;" and placing on my table a small rose embedded in moss, she left the room again. I watched her from the window as she walked down the street; she walked almost like a girl.

On my way to Josey West in the evening, I passed the house in which I had first made her acquaintance. The door being opened, I entered, and found the place in an unusual bustle. Florry and her younger sisters were dusting and cleaning up, and putting the rooms in order. In explanation, Florry told me that their eldest brother, Sheridan, was coming to live there with his wife and children.

"They come in next week," said Florry; "and I daresay Clarence and his family will follow them; they have always lived together, and they won't like to be parted now. There's plenty of room for them all."

"The place will look like its old self

again," I said to Josey West, a few minutes later on; and I added, with a sigh, "and you'll be having the jolly old times over again, I shouldn't wonder."

"I shouldn't wonder, either," replied the little woman briskly. "Do you know, Chris, there's one thing I do miss—the Sunday evenings we used to have in the old house. Now that Sheridan is coming, we'll revive the Sunday-night suppers. You'll come, won't you, and bring your dear mother. She's never been to one of our parties. Upon my word, I feel quite happy only in thinking of them. There's Sheridan and his seven youngsters, and Clarence with his five—another one added, Chris, a fortnight ago—the sweetest little thing! Well, I do love to have a lot of children about me. When I die, an old woman—I shall be the queerest little old woman *you* ever set eyes on, Chris!—well, when I die, an old, old woman, I should like to see heaps of children round me, so that I might take the memory of their bright little faces away with me. It

isn't often that I talk seriously, but I've got that fancy."

"You ought to have children of your own, Josey."

Josey was stitching and mending some of the youngsters' clothes, and, at my remark, she paused and looked at me pensively ; but the next moment she gave such a vicious dig with her needle that she broke it, and cried,

"Ought to have ! Ought to have ! Me, with my crooked legs ! No, my dear, never, never, never ! Little witches don't have children. Never, never, never !"

And for the first time in my experience of her, Josey West burst out crying. Her passion did not last long ; she conquered it within a couple of minutes, and, as she wiped her eyes, exclaimed,

"There ! A nice little fool you'll think me now, Chris !"

I gave her a kiss, and in a little while she was herself again, rattling away as usual.

"I'm going to sleep in the old house every night," she said, "until Sheridan takes possession; and Turk is coming here to sleep, and to mind the shop, if I want to get away a bit earlier. I wish Turk would marry. I should like to take care of his children. He's a real good sterling fellow is Turk, and deserves a happy home. Your mother was here this afternoon, Chris. She told me all that you said to her."

"You guess, I daresay, what my reason is in wishing her to see Jessie."

Josey West laughed. "I guess, you daresay! Well, yes, I can guess, although I am not in love."

I shook my head. "I don't think you have guessed, Josey. It is not for myself that I want mother and Jessie to come together again."

"What other reason can you have, my sweet sensitive child?"

"Oh, I don't mind your bantering me, Josey. Do you remember sending me a

letter from uncle Bryan addressed to mother, when we were away at Hertford?"

"Yes; and I wondered at the time what such a thick letter could be all about."

"It contained a great secret, Josey, and a very wonderful story concerning Jessie."

"Indeed!" said Josey, with a cautious look at me.

"I think there is no harm in telling you, especially as you'll not speak of it."

"Oh, you may trust me, master Chris."

"It is a story concerning Jessie and her father."

"Indeed! So Jessie has a father."

"You would never guess who her father is, Josey."

"Then I won't break my head over it; but I shall know if you tell me."

"Uncle Bryan is her father; so that you see Jessie and I are cousins."

Josey did not express the surprise I expected she would; an expression of thoughtfulness was in her face.

"Go on, Chris; I am waiting to hear more."

"Well, neither Jessie nor uncle Bryan knew of the relationship existing between them until the day that Jessie went away from this house, and then it came upon them both like a thunderbolt. It was because Jessie discovered that uncle Bryan was her father that she ran away from him."

"That sounds very dreadful, Chris."

"There is a dreadful story attached to it—which I mustn't tell you nor anybody, Josey. They are both very much to be pitied; but I am not sure that I don't pity uncle Bryan more than I do Jessie. However, there it is; they are father and daughter, and they are separated. Never mind what has passed, I ask you is this right—is it natural? Uncle Bryan is an old man, and cannot have many years to live. That he repents many things he has been unconsciously guilty of in the past, I am certain."

"That is a curious phrase," interrupted Josey, with her thoughtful manner still upon her. "Unconsciously guilty."

"It is a correct one. His has not been

conscious guilt; what was bad in his character was stamped in him, and was almost forced to take root by the unfortunate circumstances in his early life; what was good never had a chance. We all have good and bad in us, Josey, and surrounding circumstances have much to do in making one or the other predominate in our characters. What is that thought that crossed your eyes just now, Josey?"

"I was thinking that you have grown into a perfect philosopher, Chris. Go on."

"Say that uncle Bryan had been blessed with such a mother as my mother is—he would have been a different man; he couldn't have helped being a better man. He would have believed in God, in goodness; he would not have grown into a misanthrope. Josey, if there is anything good in me—and I hope I am not all bad—I have mother only to thank for it. It makes me tremble to think that I was so nearly losing her, and that her love for me was very nearly her death; and I know, to my sorrow, that for a long

time I repaid her affection with indifference. Well, but that is all over now, thank God! If uncle Bryan had had a good, tender, considerate mother, many unhappy things would not have occurred to him, and it might have been better for Jessie also. As I said, it is dreadful to think of father and daughter being separated as they are, and to think that uncle Bryan might die without a word of affection passing between them. Well, that was the thought in my mind when I said to mother to-day that she ought to go to Jessie; for if mother finds uncle Bryan—and I have an idea that she will—no one but she can bring him and Jessie together.”

“But you didn’t tell your mother this, Chris?”

“No; mother did not need telling. She knew my meaning well enough. Words are not required between us now, Josey, to make us understand one another.”

“And so, and so, and so,” said Josey, with tender gaiety, when I had concluded,

“everything having been made right, they lived happily together for ever afterwards.”

It was with sadness I remembered that those were the very words which Jessie had spoken to me in the little parlour in which Josey and I were now conversing.

“Now I’m a witch,” cried Josey, “and I’ll give you three wishes. What are they?”

I looked at her reproachfully, but she did not heed me. She hobbled about as witches are in the habit of doing on the stage, and waved the poker over my head, and conducted herself generally in a ridiculous manner.

“Hallo!” cried Turk, poking his head in at the door. “What are you about with your pokers? What a pity I didn’t come in a minute later! There’s an account I could have written for the papers! ‘The first thing that met Our Correspondent’s view was the distended’—distended is good, Chris, my boy; I’ve seen it used so—‘was the distended form of the unfortunate victim on the ground, winking his last gasp. Over

him stood the infuriated figure of a woman, who, with glistening eyes and rage in her countenance, was brandishing the murderous weapon—an enormous crowbar, weighing fifty-three pounds—preparatory to giving a last fell stroke to the prostrate form at her feet.’ That’s the style, Chris; a penny a line. Spin it out—*must* have at least two columns. ‘Upon inquiry among the neighbours, who stood in clusters about the building in which the murderous deed was perpetrated, Our Correspondent learned that jealousy was the cause of the fatal assault. It appears that thirteen years ago there lived in a certain street, called et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.’ Now, after that, Chris, if you start an illustrated paper, and don’t employ me as Special Correspondent, I shall have a bad opinion of your judgment.”

I was relieved by this diversion, and upon Turk proposing that we should pay a visit to the Royal Columbia Theatre, in which he had played the first villain for so long a time, I gladly assented.

I left a message for my mother, desiring her to wait with Josey until I returned, and Turk and I strolled to the theatre. I found not the slightest alteration either in the theatre, the audience, or the performance; they were all the same—the same atmosphere, the same fashions, the same pieces with different names. The very dresses were the same; but I was bound to confess that the First Villain was vastly inferior to Turk, who, I learned, had left a reputation behind him which would last while the walls held together. We did not stay longer than an hour, and then, as we had done on the occasion of my first visit to the Royal Columbia, we visited a neighbouring bar, and over our pewter pots listened and took part in a precisely similar conversation to that which I had listened to with such respectful admiration and attention after the performance of the thrilling drama of “The Knight of the Sable Plume.” The decadence of the drama, the low ebb of dramatic literature, the glorious days of Garrick and Kemble, the inferior parts.

which men and women of genius were compelled to play upon the mimic stage, the false positions which pretenders were puffed into by venal critics who ignored real talent—these were the themes touched upon; and I began to reflect whether this state of things was chronic in the profession, and whether, when the golden age of the drama is in its full meridian, the decadence of the drama will not be spoken of as mournfully as it is in the present day.

My mother was waiting for me when I returned; but although she was exceptionally bright and happy, and although there was a tenderly joyous significance in her words and manner towards me, she said nothing of the result of her visit to Jessie.

CHAPTER XV.

UNCLE BRYAN AGAIN.

“CHRIS,” says my mother to me, on the following day, “can you leave off work an hour earlier this evening?”

“Yes, mother,” I replied; “at six o’clock if you like.”

“Then at six o’clock,” she says gaily, “I shall take possession of you.”

As the hour strikes, she comes to my side dressed for walking.

“No tea, mother?” I ask.

“We are going out to tea, my dear,” she answers.

I keep her waiting but a very few minutes, and presently we are in the streets. I know that something of importance is about to be disclosed to me, and that it will please my

mother to be allowed to disclose it in her own way ; therefore I hazard no conjectures, and we talk on indifferent subjects. But this does not prevent me from working myself into a state of agitation as to the precise nature of our errand. We take the omnibus to Holborn, and from there we walk towards Bedford-square. My mother leads the way down a clean narrow street, and we pause before a small three-storied house.

“Somebody lives here that we know,” says my mother, as she knocks at the door.

“Can it be Jessie?” I ask of myself, as I glance upwards. There are flowers on the window-sills of the first and third floor ; those on the first floor are especially fine, and almost entirely cover the windows. It is on the third floor we stop when we enter the house.

“Remember what you said to me, my dear,” my mother whispers, as we enter the room.

There is no one to receive us, but my mother goes into an inner room, and

comes out of it presently, and motions me with a tender smile to go in. I enter alone; an old man with white hair is standing by the window, looking towards the door. A grave expression is on his face, which is deeply lined; I recognise uncle Bryan immediately, although he is much changed. I had had in my mind a lingering hope that my mother was taking me to see Jessie; but in the pleasure of seeing uncle Bryan I lose sight for a few moments of my disappointment.

“Uncle,” I say, as I advance towards him with outstretched hand.

He meets me half-way, and clasps my hand eagerly in his, and then turns aside with quivering lips, still holding my hand. I know that he has noticed both my pleasure and my disappointment, and I hope it is not the latter that causes him to turn aside.

I have said that he is changed, but I find it difficult to explain in what way he is different from what he was. It is not that his hair has grown quite white during the months that we have been parted, it is not that his

form is bowed, or that his features are more deeply-lined ; the same shrewd thoughtful expression is there, but in some undefinable way it is softened, and although the old look of self-reliance is in his eyes, it is less hard than it was. As I silently note these changes, I am reminded of a passage I read a few days before this meeting, in which a man is said to have had in his face an expression which might have been brought there by the touch of angel fingers on his eyelids while he slept.

“I received your message yesterday, my dear boy,” he says presently. “Your mother brought it straight to me. It gladdened my heart inexpressibly.”

Then I knew that my mother must have been in the habit of visiting him for some time ; it does not surprise me to learn this ; every day of her life brings me fresh proofs of her goodness.

“How long ago was it, uncle,” I ask, “since mother discovered where you were living ?”

"Quite a month, my dear boy," he replies, and adds quickly, "it was my wish that she should say nothing to you until I gave her permission."

I smile softly at this defence of her.

"She can do nothing wrong," I say. "I think I know the spirit that lives in the hearts of angels."

My mother, who is preparing tea for us, peeps in here.

"Do you forgive me, my dear," she says. "You never thought your mother would deceive you, I daresay."

"I shall have to consider very seriously," I say, kissing her, "before I can pronounce an opinion on your conduct. There are some things that take a long time in learning."

She stands between us, embracing us, glancing with tearful eyes from one to the other.

"But I must make haste, and get tea ready," she cries, running away from us; "there! the kettle's boiling over."

"Which is the better kind of wisdom,

uncle," I say ; " that which comes from the head or the heart ? "

He answers, " That which touches us most deeply, which makes us kinder, more tender and tolerant, less harsh and dogmatic, more charitable and merciful, must be the better kind of teaching. All this springs from the heart. You said to your mother just now that some things take a long time in learning. I have been all my life learning a lesson, and have but now, when I am near my grave, mastered it. In plays, in poems, in stories, in songs, those words and sentiments which appeal to the heart are invariably most effective. You see, my dear boy, my views are changed. "

After this he asks me about myself, and I tell him what has passed ; and he listens with pleasure and patience, as though he had not already heard it all from my mother's lips ; but I do not think of this at the time.

" You have not mentioned Jessie's name, " he says, " thinking perhaps it would pain

me ; but I can speak of her without grief, if not without sadness. I have only one wish in life now, my dear lad."

Believing that he refers to a reconciliation between himself and Jessie, and having full faith in my mother's power to bring this about, I say that I earnestly hope it will be fulfilled, and that I believe it will be. He gazes at me with a soft light in his eyes.

"You know in what relation she stands to me, Chris?"

"Yes, uncle."

"If I could give her to you, my dear boy——"

But I stop him here, and beg him in scarcely distinct words not to continue the subject.

"But one word, Chris," he says ; "you love her still?"

"With all my heart, uncle, and shall all my life. But it hurts me to speak of her ; I can bear it better in silence."

My mother calls out that tea is ready, and once more we three sit down together.

“I miss the little parlour,” my mother says; “how many happy years we lived there!”

She forgets all the sorrow and pain we experienced there, and recalls only the tenderest reminiscences. Occasionally a flash of uncle Bryan’s old humour gives piquancy to the conversation, but there is now no bitterness or cynicism in what he says. At eight o’clock my mother puts on her bonnet; I am surprised that we are going so early, but she says it is a fine night and that she feels inclined for a walk.

“Uncle Bryan will walk with us,” I say.

My mother shakes her head, smilingly, and says she does not want him. I look towards uncle Bryan; he does not seem in the least disturbed.

“We shall see each other again soon,” he says, as he shakes hands with me on the doorstep of his house.

“You will come to us, then,” I say eagerly.
“I want to show you my work.”

"Yes, I will come very soon; but your mother will see to everything, Chris."

"There is one thing I want particularly to ask you, uncle, if you'll not mind."

"Say it, my dear boy."

"Living here, all alone, as you are doing," I say, and I pause somewhat awkwardly.

He assists me.

"Yes, my dear boy—living here all alone, as I am doing——"

"I was thinking it must be very lonely for you, uncle."

"It is a lonely life, Chris, living by oneself."

"And without any friends near you."

"Yes, my dear boy."

"I want you to give up these rooms, uncle, and come and live with us, or if you wouldn't like to do that, to go back to your shop."

His eyes brighten; my mother's eyes also are beaming.

"It would be a pity to take the shop away from that good little woman, Josey West."

And you would really like me to come and live with you again?"

"It would make us very happy—mother especially. Look at her face."

"With all my eccentricities and oddities, you would still wish me to come?"

"Ah, but you are altered now." He makes a grimace. "Well, even if you were not, I should be very, very glad if you would come. You can give me lessons in flower-growing."

I glance up to the windows in which the flowers were blooming. His eyes follow mine.

"Which do you think the best, Chris; those on the first or those on the third floor?"

"On the first floor certainly, and I am surprised at it. I thought no one could beat you. Mother was never so successful as you were. Your flowers were always the finest."

He rubs his hands, and says,

"Well, we shall see, we shall see." And then, more earnestly, "I am glad you have

asked me, Chris ; I was wishing for it. Good-night now ; we'll talk of it by-and-by."

As he seems evidently wishful to get rid of us, and as my mother seems no less anxious to go, I take my leave. On our way home we pass a theatre, and my mother expresses a wish to enter ; we go into the pit, and witness a French comic opera done into English. The performance is a good one, but is spoilt by the unnecessary introduction of some foreign dancers, whose coarse vulgarity and outrageous disregard for decency shock my mother. It is seldom that my mother goes to a theatre, and she says, as we come out,

"If that is to become the fashion in theatres, I am more than glad that Jessie is not going on the stage."

"Then she is not going," I asked eagerly.

"Well, my dear," replies my mother, with sudden reserve, "it almost looks as if she had given up the idea."

At home I find a letter on the table. I open it and read :

“Miss West presents her compliments to Mr. Christopher Carey, and will be happy to see him and his mother at nine o’clock to-morrow evening, at the Old House at Home.”

“Why, mother,” I say, “this is exactly like the note Josey sent to me when I first went to her place! I suppose she wants to have an evening in the old house before her brother Sheridan takes possession. I wonder if the kitchen is the same! I shall never forget my feelings when I saw it for the first time. You must come, mother; it is a wonderful sight.”

My mother smiles an assent.

“I am glad you asked your uncle to come and live with us,” she says, as she wishes me good-night.

CHAPTER XVI.

JOSEY WEST DISTURBS US IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

“WELL, Master Chris,” said Josey West, as my mother and I entered the kitchen on the following night, “here are the old times come over again. Now, children, bustle about ! Florry, take mother’s shawl and bonnet.” (They all called her mother.) “Ah, you’re looking about you, my dear ; they’re a queer lot of things, but they belong to a queer lot of people. The first night Chris came here he bumped his head. I heard some one tumbling about in the passage, and I called out to know who was there. ‘It’s me,’ Master Chris answered, as if all the world knew who Me was. ‘Come down-

stairs, Mr. Me,' I called ; and down he came head over heels, and fell sprawling right in the middle of the kitchen. Ah, that was a night ! Do you remember the scene from 'As You Like It,' Master Chris, and how mad you were when Jessie said, 'Ask me what you will, I will grant it ;' and Gus said, 'Then love me, Rosalind ?' You thought no one knew what was going on inside that head of yours, but I saw it all as clear as clear can be. I'm a witch, my dear. Did you ever hear"—(she was addressing my mother now)—"that I played an old witch for an entire season ? I did, and played it well ; I could show you the notices I got in the papers on the day they contained all about the pantomimes, but you would think me vain if I did. What a big little woman I thought myself to be sure ! I thought all the world must know me as I walked along, and I cocked up my head, I can tell you. How we do puff ourselves out, we frogs ! That's what I asked you that night, Master Chris, the name of that thing in the fable

that puffed itself out and came to grief; and I remember saying that of all the conceited creatures in this topsy-turvy world actors and actresses are the worst; though I think I know some who are almost as bad. But to come back to Gus, my dear. You've no cause to be jealous of him now; he's engaged, my dear—engaged! Here's her picture—a pretty little thing, isn't she? But Gus never would make love to a girl unless she was pretty, and he was always a bit of a flirt. He'll have to settle down now; his ogling days are over; this little bit of a thing has got hold of him as tight as a fish. They'll all be getting married directly—all of them except me and Turk perhaps—and he's the one I want to see married most of all. There's Florry there—what are you listening to, Florry?—you should see how the men are beginning to stare at her! and that sets a girl thinking, you know. As for Chris, he must be blind; I only know if I was a young man—— But there! I'll say no more, or you'll be calling me as bad a gossip as

Mrs. Simpson. Perhaps someone else would like to say a word or two ? ”

And here Josey paused to take breath. I knew that she had only chattered on in this way for the purpose of giving me time to recover myself upon entering the kitchen ; for as I looked around upon the old familiar walls, a flood of tender reminiscences had rushed upon my mind, and my eyes had filled with tears. Whether by design or accident, the kitchen presented exactly the same appearance as on the first night I had seen it. The old theatrical dresses and properties were on the walls ; the dummy man in chain armour that had once played a famous part in a famous drama was lurking in a corner ; the curtain of patchwork was hung on its line, dividing the stage from the auditorium ; and Matty and Rosy and Nelly and Sophy were busy at work on stage dresses and adornments. My mother was delighted with all she saw, and caressed the children, who all doted on her, and pulled out of her pocket a packet of sweetmeats for them. Her

brain could never have been idle ; when she went on the simplest errand, she must have thought of it beforehand, and her affectionate thoughtful nature invariably made that errand pleasant to some one. Her wonderful thoughtfulness, wedded as it was to affection and unselfishness, was one of her greatest charms ; it strewed her course through life with flowers which sprang up in barren places, and gladdened many a sad heart. I know that, between ourselves, every wish I formed was anticipated before I expressed it, and while the words explaining it were on my lips, she was scheming how it could be gratified. This charming and most beautiful quality—which in a home breeds love, and keeps it always sweet and fresh—was exhibited on such an occasion as our present visit to Josey, in the pleasantest of ways. As my mother chatted with Josey, she handed one child the thread, another the wax, another something which the little one's eyes were seeking for ; and all these things were done in the most natural manner, and

without in the least disturbing her conversation with Josey. Trivial as these matters are, they are deserving of mention ; happy must be that home which has such a spirit moving in its midst !

“The youngsters are all at work, I see,” I said to Josey, when I had mastered my agitation ; “to fill up the time, I suppose.”

“Not a bit of it, Master Chris,” replied Josey. “Sophy and Rosy and Matty have an engagement to play in a new burlesque ; they play the Three Graces—very little ones they will be, but it’s a burlesque, you know—and very well they’ll look. Now then, up with you, and go through the first scene.”

The children jumped from their chairs, and went through the scene, speaking with pretty emphasis the few words intrusted to them, and dancing with infinite grace. It was amusing to witness the gravity with which they tucked up their dresses so as to show their petticoats, which looked more like ballet clothes than their brown frocks. We all applauded heartily.

“Bravo! bravo!” cried Turk, who had entered during the scene. “If the author isn’t satisfied with that performance, then nothing will satisfy him. But nothing less than a hundred nights’ run ever does satisfy an author—How are you, mother? How do you do, Chris, my boy? Well, Josey, old girl! No, nothing less than that ever does satisfy an author, who invariably says, when a piece is a failure, that the actors are muffs and don’t know their business. But they get as good as they give; let actors alone for reckoning up an author. They know how much of the credit belongs to them, and how much to him.”

Josey laughed merrily at this.

“It almost always all belongs to the actor, Turk,” she said.

“Of course it does, and very properly too. The audience say, when an actor makes a point, What a clever fellow the author is! They should read the stuff: they’d form a different opinion. Josey, do you know it is nearly ten o’clock?”

A look of some meaning passed between Turk and Josey, and Josey desired the children to put away their work. Presently they all went to bed, my mother going with them at their express desire. Only Turk, Josey, and I were now in the kitchen. We talked on various subjects, not in the most natural way as it appeared to me ; I said little, not being inclined for conversation. Turk was somewhat thoughtful, and more than usually observant of me, but Josey was in the wildest of spirits, and laughed without apparent cause, and said the most absurd things.

“I knew a lady,” she said, “who played a character-part in a successful piece, which had an immense run ; it was played for more than two hundred nights. She hadn’t a great deal to say, but every time she spoke she either commenced or ended with ‘Bless my soul!’ Now, if you will believe me, her ‘Bless my soul!’ made the piece. Every time she said it the audience roared with laughter, and you could hear them as they went away from the theatre of a night say-

ing, 'Bless my soul!' to one another, and laughing, as if there was really something wonderfully comic in the words. It was a great misfortune to her, for her mind so ran upon it, that morning, noon, and night she was continually saying nothing but 'Bless my soul!' until her friends got so wearied of it that they wished she hadn't a soul to bless. I slept with her one night, and all through her sleep she was talking to herself, and blessing her soul. It was the ruin of her as an actress; for always afterwards the people in the theatre called out, 'Hallo! here comes "Bless-my-soul!"' and of course that spoilt the effect of a good many of her characters."

"But that's not as bad," said Turk, "as me when I played *The Thug* for seven months. Do you remember, Josey?"

"Do I remember it?" Josey repeated, with a look of comic horror. "Haven't I cause to remember it? You see, Chris, he had to strangle people in the piece. How many every night, Turk?"

"Seventeen," he replied, in a tone of great satisfaction.

"He had to strangle seventeen people every night for seven months, my dear. Well, that made an impression upon him, and I daresay he began to look upon himself as a lawful strangler. I must say, that when he strangled the people on the stage, he did it in such a manner that no one could help believing that he enjoyed it."

"It was realistic acting, Josey," said Turk complacently; "that's what it was."

"It was a little too realistic for me," observed Josey. "For what do you think he did one night, Chris, my dear? He was living in this house at the time, and we all went to bed quite comfortably, after a heavy supper. Turk had had a great triumph that night, and the audience were so delighted with the way in which he strangled his victims, that they called him before the curtain more than once. We talked of it a great deal after supper. Well, in the middle of the night I woke up with a curious sensation upon

me. Something seemed to be crawling towards me very stealthily. I listened in a terrible fright, and sure enough I heard some creature crawling in the room. I lit a candle quickly, you may be sure ; and there I saw Turk in his night-shirt, as I'm a living woman, creeping about on the floor, as he was in the habit every night of creeping about on the stage in the character of The Thug. He was fast asleep, my dear. 'Turk ! Turk !' I cried, and I was about to jump out of bed and give him a good shaking, when he shouted, 'Ha ! ha ! I have you ! Die ! die !' and he ran up to me. My dear, if I hadn't jumped out on the other side of the bed, and poured a jug of cold water down his back, I believe he would have strangled me. It woke him up, and a nice state he was in. Every night after that, until the run of the piece was over, and he was playing other characters, I locked him in his bed-room, and took away the key. I wasn't going to have the children strangled in their sleep, and Turk hanged for it. I used to

go to the door of his room in the dead of night, and more than once I heard him crawling about on the floor, strangling imaginary people, with his 'Ha! ha! Die! die!' He never knew anything of it, my dear, and used to come down to breakfast looking as innocent as a lamb."

Turk seemed to take pride in this narration.

"It shows that I was in earnest," he said.
"There's ten o'clock striking."

We listened in silence, and did not speak until the last echo had quite died away. Then I raised my head and saw that Josey was looking at me very earnestly.

"Chris, my dear," she said, somewhat nervously, "You have good cause to remember the first night you came into this house."

"Indeed I have, Josey," I replied.

"I'm going to give you better cause to remember to-night. I'm a little witch, you know." She hobbled about the kitchen, and after going through some absurd pantomime, came and stood close behind me. I should

have been inclined to laugh, but that Turk's serious face made me serious. "Now, then," she continued, placing her arms round my neck, and her hands upon my eyes, "ever since I played that witch, I've had the idea that I could do magic things if I tried. I'm going to try now; shut your eyes, and wish." She placed her lips close to my ear, and I thought she was about to whisper something, but she kissed me instead. I humoured her, and did not make an effort to free myself from her embrace. We must have remained in this position for fully two minutes, during which time I heard the door open and shut. When Josey removed her hands, I saw my mother sitting on one side and uncle Bryan on the other. I held out my hand gladly to him; Josey clapped hers in delight.

"It was a whim of this good little woman's," said uncle Bryan, looking at Josey affectionately. "And we were compelled to let her have her way. We owe her too much to refuse her anything."

"But you don't look as surprised as I

thought you would, Master Chris," exclaimed Josey, in a tone of assumed disappointment.

"Well, the truth is, Josey," I said, "I saw uncle Bryan yesterday; so it is not so much of a surprise as you thought it would be."

"Oh, indeed!" she said.

"And then again," I said, taking her hand, "do you think that anything kind from you can surprise me? No, indeed, Josey; we all have cause to know the goodness of your heart. I couldn't love a sister better than I love you."

"Did anybody ever hear the like of that!" she exclaimed, laughing and crying at one time. "As if a single girl wanted to be loved like a sister! Never mind, Chris, my dear, don't mind what I say; you know what I mean. But, as the first act of my piece is not as successful as I thought it would be, I shall have nothing to do with the second. Oh, yes, it's in two acts, Chris!"

Before I could speak, uncle Bryan took up her words.

“It is another of this good little woman’s whims, my dear boy,” he said, “that we should all sleep in the old shop to-night, as we used to do, your mother, you, and I. It will only be for this one night, Chris, notwithstanding Josey’s persuasion, for if all goes well I shall regularly make over the business to her; and to-morrow morning she will take possession again.”

“You have decided to come and live with us,” I said; “that is good, isn’t it, mother?”

“We shall have time to talk over that to-night, my dear boy.”

“Then the best thing you can do,” said Josey briskly, “is to run away at once and settle it. I sha’n’t be able to close my eyes until I know how it is all settled. There! Away with you!” And she fairly hustled us out of the house.

“Let us walk slowly,” said uncle Bryan, “it is a fine night, and I have something to say to you. Nay, Emma, don’t walk away; I should like you to hear me. Chris, the words you addressed to me the last night

we were together in the old shop have never left my mind. Do not interrupt me, my dear boy—I think I know what you wish to say. You would say that you spoke too strongly, and that you painted all that had passed in colours too vivid; let that be as it may, you spoke the truth. I recognised it then; I recognise and acknowledge it now. But the pain which I suffered—and I did suffer most keenly, my dear boy—was not so much for myself as for your dear mother, for I saw that every word you spoke wounded her tender heart. Had you seen this, you would have held your tongue, and I should have been spared a just punishment. Chris, I did not ask you yesterday, although it was in my mind to do so; I ask you now: have you forgiven me?”

I was humbled by the humbleness of his tone and manner. It might have been a child who was pleading to me. I found it impossible to speak, but I threw my arms round his neck, and kissed him.

“That is well, that is well,” he said; “I have but one wish now—to repair the wrong

I have done. You said that I had driven all hope of happiness from your heart; what kind of happiness should *I* experience if I could restore what I have robbed you of! Repentance is good; atonement is better."

I knew by his agitated tone how strong was his wish, and I pressed his hand. Silence was best at such a time.

Shortly afterwards we arrived at the shop, and I saw a light gleaming through the shutters. To my surprise, uncle Bryan, instead of unlocking the door, knocked at it, and I found myself wondering who was inside; all them embers of Josey West's family were at home in their old house. As uncle Bryan knocked, my mother grasped my hand tightly; I looked into her face, and saw in it an expression of love, so sweet and pure, and yet withal so wistful and yearning, that a wild unreasonable hope entered my heart. I could not have defined it, but it seemed to me that something good was about to occur. The door was opened from within, and uncle Bryan stood for a moment on the threshold. Before I could follow him my mother pulled

my face down to hers, and kissed me more than once with great tenderness.

"You are crying, mother," I said ; and then I thought that joy on entering the old shop, and sleeping again beneath its roof, had caused her tears.

"God bless you, my darling !" she sobbed ;
"God bless you !"

We entered the shop ; uncle Bryan was standing there alone ; a light was in the little parlour.

"Go in, Chris," he said.

I went in, and there sat Jessie, working at the table. She looked towards me, with a smile that was tender and arch upon her lips. I passed my hands across my eyes, scarcely believing the evidence of my senses.

"It is true, Chris," she said, rising ; "are you not glad to see me ?"

I looked round for uncle Bryan and my mother ; they were not in the room, and the door was closed behind me. Then I understood it all.

"Have you come back for good, Jessie ?"
I asked.

"I can't hear you," she replied, "you are so far away!"

I stepped close to her side, and my arm stole round her waist; she sighed happily.

"Have I come back for good?" she repeated. "That is for you to decide, Chris."

"You are in earnest with me, Jessie?"

She smiled. "I saw you yesterday," she said.

"Where?"

"When you came to see your uncle Bryan; I have been living in the same house, on the first floor, Chris, where the finest flowers are. Do you begin to understand?"

"Tell me more, Jessie. Did mother know you were living there?"

"Yes, and Josey West, and Turk also. Nearly all that money that Turk borrowed of you was for me—to pay what Mr. Rackstrow said I owed him. Would you have lent it to me if you had known?"

"You must answer that question for me, Jessie," I said, still uncertain of the happiness that was in store for me. We were standing

by the mantelshelf, on which lay a little packet in brown paper. Jessie took it in her hand.

"Mother told me to give you this. Stay, though; what is that round your neck?"

"The ribbon you gave me, Jessie."

"And the locket, where is that?"

"It is here, Jessie." I showed it to her; the earnest look that was struggling to her eyes came into them fully.

"You did not cast me quite away, then? Have you always worn it, Chris?"

"Always, Jessie."

"I am glad, I am glad," she murmured, and presently said, "Here is your packet, Chris."

I opened it, and found the watch and the ivory brooch I had intended to give Jessie on her birthday.

"Do you know what is in this packet, Jessie?"

"No, Chris."

I took the trinkets out of the paper.

"I bought them as a birthday present for

you, Jessie. Look at what is engraved inside the watch, and if you can accept it, you will make me very happy."

She opened the case and read: "From Chris to Jessie, on her eighteenth birthday. With undying love." Her eyes were fixed upon the inscription for a much longer time than was necessary for the reading and understanding of the words. When she raised them, tears were glistening in them.

"Will you fasten it for me, Chris?" she said, in a low soft tone.

With an ineffable feeling of happiness I placed the slender chain about her neck, and while my arms were round her she raised her face to mine, and I kissed her.

A few minutes later, while we were still alone, Jessie said,

"You know why I left home on my birthday, Chris?"

"I know all, Jessie."

"And yet not quite all, I think. I shall have no secrets from you, Chris, not one. I believe I should have left soon afterwards,

even if it had not been for my mother's letter, and for the discovery that uncle Bryan was my father."

"For what reason, Jessie?"

"You do not suspect, then?"

"I have a dim suspicion, dear, but I would prefer you to tell me."

"Chris," she said, very seriously, "you loved me too much."

"That could not be, Jessie."

"It could and can be. In your love for me you forgot some one else, a thousand million times better than I am, Chris."

"My mother?"

"Your mother. I reproached myself every day and every night for being the cause of this; I was afraid that your attachment to that dearest angel on earth was growing weaker and weaker, and I knew that I was the cause of it. I saw the pain, the unutterable pain, my dear, that your neglect of your mother was causing her tender heart, and I was continually striving to discover in what way you could be brought to learn how much more pure and beautiful and sacred her

love was than mine. If things had gone on in the same way, I should have run away as it was, Chris, so that you might have been forced to seek for comfort in the shelter of her love. Do you understand me, my dear? Your love for me made you colour-blind."

How much dearer this confession made Jessie to me I need not describe.

"I see things in a better light now, my darling," I said humbly; "I am no longer colour-blind."

Uncle Bryan and my mother would not have disturbed us all the night if we had not called to them to come in and share our happiness.

Those who understand the strength and purity of love can understand by what links of tender feeling we were henceforward bound to one another—sacred links which death itself will be powerless to sever.

Jessie sat on a stool at her father's feet; my mother and I sat close to them, my hand on Jessie's neck, clasped in one of hers.

It must have been two o'clock in the morning, and we were still talking, uncon-

scious of the hour, when a great thumping was heard at the street-door. I jumped to my feet, and opened the door, and Josey West ran in.

"I couldn't help it, my dears," she cried; "I know I have no business here, but I should have done something desperate if I hadn't run round to see how you were all getting on. I went to bed, but as I'm a living woman I couldn't sleep a wink; so I got out of bed and dressed myself, and thought, I'll just see if there's a light in the shop. And when I came and saw the light, how could I help knocking? Well, Chris, how do you like the second act? Better than the first? I do believe, as the speechmakers say, this is the happiest day of my life."

And the queer good little woman fell to crying and kissing us.

I am afraid you would scarcely believe me if I were to tell you at what time we went to bed that night.

CHAPTER XVII.

MY MOTHER'S BIBLE.

I RESUME my pen after an interval of two years.

Within a few weeks after the events described in the last chapter Jessie and I were married. There were six bridesmaids, Josey and Florry West, and their four little sisters. On that day my mother gave uncle Bryan a Bible.

Josey is sole proprietor of the grocer's shop, and the business has wonderfully improved. She is really making and saving money. This, of course, is known, and has attracted the attention of more than one young man; I say more than one, for there is one in particular who seems to consider that if he were a grocer he would be in his

proper groove. His chance, however, of getting into that groove does not appear to be a good one.

"I know what he's casting sheep's eyes at," says Josey, tossing her head; "I see him reckoning up the stock every time he comes into the shop."

She does not openly discourage him; she makes him spend all his pocket-money in candied lemon-peel and uncle Bryan's medicines, which are having an immense sale.

"You are injuring that young man's constitution, Josey," I say.

"All the better," she replies; "with his present constitution, he'll never suit Josey West."

"Don't you ever intend to marry, Josey?"

"I haven't quite made up my mind, Chris; but if I don't die an old maid I shall be very much surprised."

Turk is doing well, but I have lately discerned in him an itching to go on the stage again. He has purchased a splendid wardrobe that belonged to a famous First Villain, and he is reading a manuscript play by a

new author with a character in it which he says would take all London by storm.

"No one can play that character but Turk West!" says old Mac, who is egging him on.

"It would be a thousand pities," says Turk, "not to play the piece. It's a work of genius—original, Chris, my boy, original!" And then he adds, musingly, "I've a good mind to; I've a good mind to. The situations are tremendous. New blood, Chris, that's what's wanted—new blood."

Florry is just married. Her husband is a very elegant young man, and plays walking gentlemen. Every year babies are being introduced into the world by the married Wests. The number of children in that family is something amazing, and aunt Josey is idolised by all of them.

Uncle Bryan lives with us. I am prospering, and our home is a very happy one. How could it be otherwise with two such women as my mother and Jessie to brighten and bless it! A great grief, however, came to us lately.

Our union was blessed by a child—a sweet

beautiful little girl, whose presence was a new happiness to us. I have not the power to describe the emotion which filled my heart when my dear Jessie placed this treasure in my arms; Jessie's joy and my mother's may be imagined, but it would be difficult to realise the depth of uncle Bryan's feelings towards the darling. We named her Frances, after Jessie's mother; it was uncle Bryan's wish. His love for the dear little creature became a worship; he was restless and unhappy if a waking hour passed without his seeing her. He nursed her, and prattled to her, and rocked her cradle, and would sit for hours by her side while she was sleeping. She grew to love him, and her beautiful eyes would dilate, and she would wave her dimpled arms when he held out his to her. When she was ten months old, and just when she began to lisp the word so dear to a mother's ears, she was taken from us.

Ah, how well I remember the sad days that followed! This may sound strange, when you know that a very few months have passed since our bereavement, but it

expresses my feeling. Our darling seemed, as it were, to sink into the past, and I saw her ever afterwards, as one in a deep pit looks upwards in the daylight to the heavens and sees a star there. When I am an old man, the memory of this dear child will shine with a clear light among a forest of unremembered days. On the night before she was buried, I walked to the room where she lay in her coffin. I opened the door softly, and saw uncle Bryan on his knees by the coffin's side ; his hands were clasped, and on the body of our darling lay an open book from which he was reading. It was the Bible which my mother had given him on our wedding-day.

Farewell.

THE END.

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